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# **Peer Talk: Hidden Stories**

## **A Participatory Research Project with Women Who Sell or Swap Sex in Teesside**

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**Maggie O'Neill, Alison Jobe, Colleen Bilton,  
Kelly Stockdale, Kath, Hannah  
and community co-researchers.**



Community co-researchers visualise the research aims in creative sculptures

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all the women who gave the time to be interviewed by the community co-researchers and to all the stakeholders. It was a pleasure working with you.

### *Special thanks to:*

- The community co-researchers, without you the research would not have the detail and expertise that is necessary to support change in the services, policies and practice.
- Northern Rock who funded A Way Out to undertake and manage this research.
- Rosie Campbell OBE and Gaynor Trueman for reading a draft of the report.

## The Research Team

The research was managed by Colleen Bilton, Programme Research Manager at A Way Out. Professor Maggie O'Neill (University of Durham & York) and Dr Alison Jobe (University of Durham) were commissioned to work with A Way Out to train the community co-researchers (peer researchers). This involved: co-producing the research design and research tools; gaining ethical approval for the research from Durham University; supporting and advising the research manager and peer researchers; analysing the data and writing up the report in collaboration with Colleen Bilton and the community co-researchers. Dr Kelly Stockdale (independent researcher) joined the team part way through the research. Dr Stockdale undertook some stakeholder interviews alongside community co-researchers, Colleen Bilton and Maggie O'Neill. Dr Stockdale was a member of the team writing up of the report. Two of the five community co-researchers gave their consent to be named in the report.

Research Training was also undertaken by the following who worked alongside the community co-researchers as research buddies: Nicola Dalton, Helen Thomas, Ann Illingworth, Shell Douglas, Niomi Rodrigues, Karen Guest-Clark and Chloe Graham.

The research report was launched at the Centre for Sex, Gender and Sexualities, the Lindisfarne Conference Centre, University of Durham on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016. In keeping with the participatory principles underpinning the research further consultation with stakeholders took place at this event and is incorporated into the final section of this report.

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## Foreword

In 2013, The Northern Rock Foundation (NRF) approached A Way Out to develop a proposal to carry out participatory peer research to explore the hidden lives of sex workers living in Stockton and Middlesbrough. This was to be carried out in partnership with Barnardo's SECOS and Durham University. NRF wanted to mirror the peer research carried out by Changing Lives in Tyne and Wear in 2012 and build upon the existing evidence base.

A Way Out is proud to have led on this research project, which has produced a detailed picture of how, where and why women sell sex, including issues associated with their personal journey into and out of sex work. A key aim of the project was to inform and shape commissioning and provision of services for a group of women, largely hidden, excluded from society and frequently distanced from the services which could help them to change their lives.

What more effective methodology could there be than Participatory Action Research which engages women who are or have been engaged in sex work as peer researchers? Involving women with direct experience of the issues being explored enables them to discuss and share their journey and feelings openly. The experience of being trained as a peer researcher is empowering, brings about new learning, new skills and an increased sense of value from having a central role in the production of knowledge. Their important contribution to the research project creates a space for the voices of women selling sex.

*Peer Talk: Hidden Stories* shines a light into the currently lived experience of 'on street' sex workers in Stockton and Middlesbrough, whose lives continue to be characterised by drug addiction, fractured family life, homelessness, abusive relationships, offending behaviour, and the risk of assault and sexual violence on a daily basis. The light shines on the need for continued focus and support for this vulnerable group, to facilitate change in their lives, escape the revolving door of disadvantage and poverty and to bring hope for brighter, happier and positively productive lives.

Importantly, the research with 'off street' sex workers, working as escorts, identifies similarities with and differences between the experience and feelings towards sex working expressed by 'on-street' sex workers. This demonstrates that there are common, but also differing service needs between on and off street sex workers.

To summarise, the research provides a better understanding of the contributory factors leading women into sex work and highlights the nature and extent of sex working in Stockton and Middlesbrough. The findings should undoubtedly help inform and shape interventions and services going forward and should help us all to focus collaboratively on what is required in the future, to better support women involved in sex work.

Sarah McManus, Chief Executive Officer



## Executive Summary

*Peer Talk: hidden stories* was funded by Northern Rock and managed by A Way Out. Durham University researchers were commissioned to undertake oversight of the research, train the community /peer researchers, design the research and research tools in collaboration with the community researchers, gain ethical approval and analyse and write the report in collaboration with the research team.

The research complements participatory research undertaken by Changing Lives and Northumbria University in Tyne and Wear, also funded by Northern Rock. *PEER: exploring the lives of sex workers in Tyne and Wear* was written in 2013 by Laing and Irving<sup>1</sup>.

## Aims

*Peer Talk: hidden stories* sought to provide an evidence base to inform service provision, knowledge, policy and practice in Teesside and specifically to:

- Document the lived experience and needs of women selling sex both on and off street including their use and experience of services;
- Document the experience of key stakeholders providing services to women selling sex both on and off street;
- Document the key issues highlighted by both sex workers and stakeholders;
- Produce targeted information for local service providers, policy-makers and key regulators in the region;
- Contribute to research, academic and policy debates in the North East region but also nationally;
- Use a participatory peer driven methodology to undertake the research and build the research capacity of academic and practitioner partners.

## What we did

Community co-researchers interviewed women selling sex about their experiences, needs and support, and the key issues affecting them. The researchers were instrumental in producing research to help us to better understand the lives and needs of women and to further develop services to support women in Teesside.

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendations from *Changing Lives, PEER Tyne and Wear research (Laing and Irving 2013)* were: the provision of training on local sex markets, designated liaison officers in services; funding for a dedicated escort service at Changing Lives; greater partnership working between social services and specialist services; greater partnership working between criminal justice agencies particularly prisons, homelessness services and women's projects; greater investigation into domestic violence and mental health; a local strategy; continued funding for the GAP project.

The community co-researchers undertook 9 interviews with escorts selling sex from flats and on-line; 17 interviews with women selling sex on street, or who had until recently worked selling sex; and 21 interviews were undertaken with stakeholders.

## **How we did it**

The research was conducted using Participatory Action Research methods. The community co-researchers were trained in participatory methods, designed the research and research tools in collaboration with the University research team, A Way Out and Barnardo's SECOS project staff and volunteers. 12 people completed this training: 5 current or former sex workers, 5 project workers and 2 A Way Out volunteers.

The community co-researchers were supported in the process by research buddies. They conducted the interviews together. Research buddies were project staff or volunteers from A Way Out and Barnardo's SECOS, and they also undertook the participatory action research training.

## **Summary of findings for street sex workers**

The on street workers (n=17) ranged in age from 28-44 years old, although the majority (n = 13) were aged between 30-35 years old.

All of the participants were White British and half (n=8) started to sell sex under the age of 18 with 1 aged only 13. 6 participants started to sell sex in their twenties and a further 3 were in their 30s; 1 woman started sex work at the age of 35.

Most of the participants (n = 14) had been working for over a year when they took part in the research, with 7 participants having worked for over 10 years. 5 participants used the phrase 'on and off' to indicate that their sex work was not continuous over this period of time.

## **Education**

7 participants had no qualifications and were interested in getting qualifications. 8 participants had 1 or more GCSEs or NVQs Level 1 and 2 in subjects such as hairdressing, catering, or counselling. 1 participant had a first year diploma. Only 1 participant had GCSEs, A Levels and a university degree.

## **Homelessness**

All but 1 of the 17 of the women had previously been homeless and spoke about the 'horrible' experience they had being homeless, and the impact it had on them, especially their mental health. They felt 'vulnerable' and homelessness, for some, contributed to their motivation for selling sex.

## **Children and Families**

13 of the women mentioned having children; for 2 women these were now grown up, and of those with younger children only 1 lived with her child. Some of the women had some contact with their children but many did not expand further on this during their interview. 1 participant had initially said she did not have children, but later in the interview spoke about having a child, but the child had tragically died.

## **Domestic Violence, Coercion & Control**

10 participants described themselves as in a relationship. Domestic violence and coercion and control appeared to be a theme across some current or previous relationships. This was not a direct question in the interview therefore the exact numbers are unknown. There was a reluctance to discuss domestic violence.

## **Routes In**

Some women were influenced by peers, friends and male partners into embarking on sex work. Drug addiction was also a common feature of routes into selling sex. Poverty, benefit sanctions, homelessness and police clampdowns on begging were mentioned as influencing factors

## **Clients**

Most of the participants (all but 1) had regular clients and preferred them because they were 'safer', 'reliable', and 'saved them going out on the streets'.

Violence was a common experience for 11 of the women, who had experienced high levels of violence including rape, assault and robbery and so many times they had lost count.

## **Experiences of Services**

Most of the women (n=13) described feeling judged by support services especially the Police and Social Services, but other services too, in a way that impacted upon them accessing support. Yet the women also felt better when they could report violent incidents with the support of agencies. Barnardo's SECOS, A Way Out, the ISVA and the Police were mentioned specifically. Women want to be believed and taken seriously and frontline support agencies play a vital role. One of the strengths of specialist support services is that the women did not feel judged.

## **Sexual Health**

Most of the women attended sexual health check-ups although not always frequently. How they are perceived and received by the support services is an important factor in attendance. They were most positive about access to condoms, chlamydia testing kits and a sexual health clinic that opens in the evening.

## **Drug Use**

13 women described using drugs long term, the main reason given was to 'block things out.' Some felt able to tell their drugs worker they were selling sex, others could not. Some women suggested they would like more female drug workers and if drug workers had more knowledge of sex work there could be an opportunity for brief supportive interventions.

## **Mental Health and Well-being**

Depression, lack of energy and motivation were described as preventing women attending appointments.

## **Policing**

Most of the on street sex workers had had some contact with the police. This included contact with routine patrol officers, alongside officers from the specialist 'vice' team and the DLO. Interviewees reported both negative and positive experiences. Interviewees stressed the need to be believed by the police, that offences against them should be taken seriously and that an increase in prosecutions would help send a strong message that the police were taking crimes against sex workers seriously.

## **Aspirations**

Future aspirations include: staying off drugs; moving on from supported accommodation; going back to college; having children returned; a job, a nice home and helping other people.

## **Summary of findings for escorts**

The 9 women interviewed were aged 22 to 44 years old at the time of interview and had started to work in escorting from age 18 to their late 30s. Most of the women interviewed had been working as an escort for the last 1 to 5 years (n=8); while 1 of the women had more than 20 years' experience of working as an escort. 4 of the women were White-British; 2 were dual heritage; 1 was White-Other and 2 did not disclose their ethnic origin.



## **Education**

The women interviewed came from a range of educational backgrounds. 5 of the women did not complete formal secondary school education to GCSE level, although 1 of these returned to complete her GCSEs and A Levels at a later date and 3 later attended college courses (including health and beauty; animal care studies and counselling courses). 4 of the women interviewed have completed university degrees; 1 at postgraduate level.

## **Housing**

7 of the women lived in privately rented accommodation; 2 were living in council/ local housing authority properties. 4 women had experienced brief periods of homelessness when in their teens/ early 20s.

## **Children and Families**

6 of the women have children and spoke of the need to support their children as a motivating factor in working as an escort. Only 1 of the women interviewed currently has a partner. Some women spoke about the difficulty of maintaining relationships whilst working and kept their work secret from friends and family, because of the stigma they felt.

## **Violence**

5 women said they had not encountered violence and 4 women described violent incidents including being aggressive, rough sex and feeling unsafe on 'out calls'. Most described working through an agency as a strategy for keeping safe. Some had more negative experience of escort agencies.

## **Routes In**

Routes in were due to: economic need; to support their families; pay off debt and to gain economic independence.

## **Working experiences**

None of the 9 women currently work from their own homes and all expressed a desire to keep their working lives and home life separate. They expressed feeling safer working for an agency, as a strategy for feeling and staying safe from violence but not all agencies offered a safe environment. Most women felt 'in control' in their work and that escorting had afforded them a better quality of life. Some said that escorting had built their confidence and/or boosted their self-esteem. Flexible working hours and work/life balance were also mentioned as benefits.

## **Clients**

Clients (all ages and ethnicities) are described as looking for intimacy and conversation as often as they are seeking sexual encounters. All of the 9 women describe being in control over condom use in sexual encounters with clients, although they do describe clients who will try to negotiate over the use of condoms. All women described having regular clients.

## **Experiences of Support Services**

### **Sexual Health**

All women accessed sexual health services, GUM and walk-in clinics. All expressed concern about the impact of their work on sexual health and were keen to have regular check-ups. All expressed feeling uncomfortable about questions asked by sexual health practitioners and often felt judged. They described making up stories about why they were presenting at a sexual health clinic to avoid disclosing that they were selling sex. 2 of the women described more positive experience with sexual health practitioners. All wanted non-judgemental sexual health services that they would feel comfortable accessing.

### **Social Services**

3 women had been involved with children's social services at some point in their lives; 2 in their own childhoods/ as young people and 1 who experienced a child custody issue.

### **Policing**

None of the 9 women interviewed have contacted the police in relation to a violent client. The majority stated they wouldn't feel comfortable approaching the police for help if they needed it, out of embarrassment at being identified and questioned about their work.

### **Drug Use**

None of the women interviewed stated any problems with drug addiction. None of the women stated that they had any convictions which related to their sex work.

### **Precarious Work and Income**

For most women escorting is their main source of income and they described earning large amounts of money from escorting. Only 4 of the women responded to the question 'do you have any other paid employment?' 2 women had other jobs but did not want to disclose what their jobs were and the other 2 didn't have any other employment.

The women described having issues with money that are related to the stigma of sex work. These difficulties impacted upon what women do with their money and how they perceive

their income. Issues highlighted by women include: difficulties in saving the money they earn from working as an escort as the money earned is cash in hand, is difficult to bank and it's difficult to pay tax on the money earned. Some describe not being able to bank the money and so it doesn't get spent 'correctly' (it gets 'wasted') and that this would not be an issue without illegality, criminalisation and stigma.

1 woman described the precarious nature of sex work and the difficult choices women have to make to manage their earnings and the stigma associated with earning money from sex working. 1 woman talked about the tax system and wanting to pay taxes but because of the stigma associated with sex work, she feels she is open to possible blackmail by a third party. "If you don't do this, I will tell, it makes you vulnerable, you are in a vulnerable position legally."

## **Aspirations**

Future aspirations include saving enough money to get onto the property ladder, return to education, fund businesses, re-train (nurse, veterinary medicine), or save money to provide for older age. Some women describe being happy to stay working as an escort and for others it was a temporary stage, a means to an end.

## **Summary of findings for stakeholders**

21 stakeholder interviews were undertaken with representatives from statutory and voluntary sector organisations. The stakeholders include public health, sexual health, criminal justice agencies (including the police and courts) as well as charities and community organisations.

We gathered information on: what services provide to sex workers; knowledge and experience of sex work as well as any key issues; policies and training.

## **What Services Provide to Sex Workers**

All agencies stated that they worked with adult females. The main focus of Barnardo's SECOS work is the sexual exploitation of children and young people and some women over 18 years. Barnardo's SECOS employs the country's first children's ISVA. Both the Police and Barnardo's SECOS describe a reduction in adult on street working in Middlesbrough.

The majority of the agencies (n=17) described their approach as multi-agency and provide support to sex workers either in a targeted direct way, A Way Out, Barnardo's SECOS, Arch North East Specialist Independent Sexual Violence Advisor role (ISVA); Police/Designated Liaison Officer (DLO), or in a more indirect way through the service they give to all service users/clients. The latter includes a GP surgery, housing providers, public health organisations and drug services. The stakeholders interviewed provide the following:

- Front line face to face support;
- Multi-agency partnerships and meetings including Safer Stockton partnership;
- Commissioning services for victims and specialist ISVA role;
- Commissioning services for drug treatment;
- Clinical provision including sexual health, drug use support, contraception and signposting to other agencies;
- Support with training needs (AWO);
- Referring women on to support agencies (AWO and SECOS);
- Delivering and receiving 'awareness' training support for volunteers from AWO;
- Public Health, sexual health commissioners who fund an "integrated health service with Stockton Borough Council, a hub and spoke clinics model funding CRI, Lifeline, drug and alcohol, young people's services and health visiting." This includes funding for sexual health support for AWO;
- Public health commissioning services for drug treatment provide pathways to mental health and housing and work on the barriers to treatment;
- Housing Options support links with Safer Stockton, drug treatment, 'housing pathways' in relation to sex workers.

## **Knowledge, Experience and Key Issues**

There is a centre or hub of expertise in the agencies working directly with women selling sex: AWO, the Police/DLO, Specialist ISVA at Arch North East and Barnardo's SECOS, along with other front line agencies such as the specialist nurse practitioner, sexual health and drug workers.

Overall the non-specialist agencies we spoke to had varying degrees of knowledge and understanding about the issue of sex work locally, regionally and nationally. All are keen to support sex workers, but have limited capacity, resources and would like more knowledge and understanding.

Policing sex work is described as targeting kerb crawlers and supporting women. So a two pronged approach that enforces the law around kerb crawlers/purchasers and a welfare based approach to sex workers is undertaken. The welfare based approach is enhanced by the recently appointed DLO role (two officers in Teesside). This has not always been the case as our analysis of police data confirms.

The safety and support of sex workers was highlighted as a priority within a multi-agency framework. Under reporting of violence to the police and safety of women selling sex through on-line contacts were highlighted by some services.

One stakeholder felt that the safety of sex workers needs to become a public protection issue and sex workers should not be criminalised.

Poverty as a motivating factor for selling sex was highlighted along with drug use, homelessness and sexual exploitation.

In Stockton the core services working with adult sex workers meet as a 'multi-agency' partnership to support adult sex workers. This was seen as an example of good practice.

Although Sexual Health Services understand the needs of sex workers, their standard assessment remains 'difficult' for some sex workers to answer in full, for example, questions about the number of partners. The women typically do not answer or provide inaccurate information. The assessment accuracy in information coming from sex workers has been discussed between A Way Out and sexual health lead providers within Public Health, to consider if the questions in the assessment can be changed.

The issue of women's housing needs was raised. Whilst one participant said that 'bricks and mortar' were not the problem, as there was housing available, how to give women the best start in independent living is currently lacking, and more so for women leaving prison who are not supported into accommodation.

The impact on residential communities in Stockton was raised by police representatives.

The importance of working with new and emerging migrant communities in order to gain a better understanding of the issues in relation to both selling and buying sex was highlighted by some stakeholders.

## **Policies and Training**

Training is the key area that all stakeholders are very keen to access. They want to understand more about the needs of sex workers both on and off street, but predominantly on street because off street is such a hidden population, and agencies connect more with on street adult workers. Training could be developed by the key agencies in collaboration with the North East Sex Work Forum.

Barnardo's SECOS runs a one day programme for men cautioned for soliciting (purchasing) offences. This was described as an 'empathic' preventative and not a 'shaming' model of working with men.

Developing the DLO Role in Teesside to better support women and address violence and sexual violence against them was also highlighted by stakeholders.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations from street sex workers focused on:

- Developing positive relationships with the police and for the police to consider the impact of some of their policies i.e. begging crackdown, ASBOs for sex work;
- The need to address safety and violence; more support around housing and on release from prison;
- Non-judgemental treatment in services, not being judged and treated differently because they sell sex on street and use drugs;
- The police to link more with organisations such as A Way Out. The latter is happening through the DLO role, and as evidenced in the Policing section of the literature review, relationships with the police and with frontline services such as A Way Out are being developed.

### Women would like:

- More support, particularly around housing, benefit sanctions and literacy, numeracy and computer skills;
- Non-judgemental support from social services;
- Non-judgemental support from all services is imperative;
- Support on release from prison;
- Support to report violence and coercion;
- Training for services to better understand and engage with them. For example, training and support so that staff might ask appropriate questions of sex workers - in order to get the best outcomes all round. The possibility of brief interventions from drug workers.

### Recommendations from *off street* sex workers focused on:

- Managing stigma and secrecy;
- The importance of non-judgemental support from agencies so that they can feel confident in being open about their working lives;
- The need to address escort agencies operating exploitative working practice/conditions and work with escort agencies that provide safe working practices;

- Building relationships with the DLO's in Teesside;
- Gaining practical help and information around tax and earnings and access to information in order to legally manage their earnings within the law.

### **Women would like:**

- To feel safer in reporting violence to police;
- Support for escort agencies offering safe working environments;
- To work with the DLOs in Teesside to help build more positive relationships with the police and to maintain safer working practices;
- Non-judgemental health services with tailored health services for escorts/sex workers;
- Information on legal ways to manage earnings and information on the law.

### **Recommendations from stakeholders**

It is interesting to note that the services supporting sex workers made similar recommendations to the sex workers. Stakeholders wanted:

- A welfare based approach to policing sex work that is enhanced by the recent appointment of the two DLO's (non-arresting licensing officers);
- The safety of sex workers is addressed as a priority;
- That routes to reporting for sex workers who have experienced violence are better utilised;
- Multi-agency partnership working to support sex workers as the gold standard;
- To consider the capacity of services in developing recommendations;
- To work with sex workers and front line sex work support agencies to improve accuracy in the information gathered about sexual health;
- To better support and engage women to use sexual health services more regularly and ensure these services are tailored to the needs of this client group;
- To better support women leaving prison and into independent living (more resources would be helpful) including a consideration of women's housing needs;

- To develop greater knowledge, understanding and ways of working with new and emerging communities around selling and buying sex. Important to work with refugee community organisations;
- To develop accessible training for all agencies that support sex workers;
- To consider the development of a regional strategy working in collaboration with the North East Sex Work Forum.

## Feedback to and Consultation with Stakeholders

Participatory Action Research emerged from the need to include stakeholders and communities as experts in research that would lead to changes in policy and practice. PAR is rigorous, ethical, action oriented and interventionist; change happens as a consequence of the research. PAR is a process that does not end when the report is written.

The research team invited participants to a stakeholder dissemination event to consider the following questions in order to share and discuss the research findings, gain feedback and then complete and disseminate the research report.

- Given the key messages in the research, is there anything else that you would like us to include – have we missed anything?
- Are there any further recommendations that you would like to see included based on the key messages contained in the research?
- How might you use this research?
- What changes/interventions would you like to see happen as a result of this research? How might we action this?

The key messages from this event with stakeholders<sup>2</sup> are documented in the final section of this report. The stakeholders endorsed the findings and recommendations of the research and wanted further information, knowledge and understanding about:

- the levels of domestic violence experienced by on street sex workers;
- the transition from prison to community;

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<sup>2</sup> The stakeholders who attended the event included commissioners, police and criminal justice agencies, Low Newton prison, magistrates, sexual health and drug agency representatives, supported housing, community safety, youth offending, Open Clasp Women's Theatre Company, UNISON women's network and the North East Women's Network.



- the impact of sex work, drug misuse, and social stigma on the families of sex workers;
- the experience and impact of benefit sanctions (highlighted by some women in our sample);
- the experiences of escort agencies;
- the experiences of male and trans workers;
- routes out of sex work (desistance).

There is further research to be done in the North East.

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## Introduction

### Rationale

The overall aim was to undertake a piece of community-based, participatory 'peer research' exploring the hidden lives of sex workers living in the Stockton-On-Tees and Middlesbrough areas of Teesside with a view to informing and shaping local services, VAWG strategies, commissioning and the provision of services for vulnerable women.

This research built on a similar piece of work undertaken by Changing Lives (formerly the Cyrenians) and Northumbria University in Newcastle & Gateshead in 2011/12 also funded by Northern Rock, which in turn built upon two studies by Barefoot Research in 2009; and the Cyrenians *Voices Heard* research in 2007.

This fourth research project undertaken in 2015-2016 provides a detailed picture of how, where, and why women in the Northeast sell sex both on and off street; including issues associated with their personal journeys into, through and for some out, of selling sex; their experiences of support services and their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Interviews took place with women selling sex both on and off street and also with key stakeholders to ensure we delivered a more holistic picture of the relatively hidden lives of female sex workers in Teesside.

A key aspect of the research was to ensure that the women interviewed would feel listened to, understood and also feel safe in sharing personal information as well as painful experiences. The community co-researchers did an excellent job in this regard.

The research was called *Peer Talk* because we worked with community co-researchers, trained by professional researchers/academics and supported by project workers and volunteers (research buddies) from A Way Out and Barnardo's SECOS to do the research. The project was managed by A Way Out.

### Aims

The research aimed to:

- Document the lived experience and needs of women selling sex both on and off street including their use and experience of services and key issues;
- Document the experience of key stakeholders providing services to women selling sex both on and off street and key issues;
- Produce targeted information for local service providers, policy-makers and key regulators in the region;
- Contribute to research, academic and policy debates in the North East region but also nationally. Using a participatory peer driven methodology, the project also sought to build the research capacity of practitioner partners.

Community co-researchers talked to women selling sex about their experiences, needs and support. The peer researchers were instrumental in producing research to help us to better understand the lives and needs of women and to develop services to support women and young people in Teesside.

## **The Sample**

9 interviews were undertaken by the off street community co-researcher with women selling sex from flats, home and on-line.

17 interviews were undertaken by on street community co-researchers with women selling sex on street.

21 interviews were undertaken with stakeholders.

Due to the changing circumstances of the community co-researchers stakeholder interviews were largely conducted by Colleen Bilton (A Way Out), community researchers Kath and Hannah, Dr Kelly Stockdale and Prof Maggie O'Neill.

The key findings of the research are detailed in Section Three of the report.

## **Section One. Review Of The Literature**

### **Regional Research**

#### **Sex work in the North East.**

This research compliments (and builds upon) previous PEER research into sex work which explored the lives and experiences of those involved in sex work in Tyne and Wear and the services supporting them (Laing and Irving, 2013).

Laing and Irving (2013) interviewed twenty 'opportunistic/survival' sex workers and found that most were women in their late 20s and 30s, a third (n=7) became involved in sex work before the age of 17 and almost half (n=9) had been working for 5 years or more. Most had negative childhoods, poor educational attainment, limited employment, contact with the criminal justice system, drug addiction, mental health issues, and had experienced homelessness and/or domestic violence. None of the women reported enjoying sex work, and all stated that sex work had a significant emotional impact on them. Although few women disclosed their sex work to health services, those that did generally had a positive response. However, the research found negative experiences with the police and social services to be strong themes across the interviews (Laing and Irving, 2013:9).

In contrast the escort group (n=14) were slightly younger in age with most in their twenties. However, unlike the 'opportunistic/survival sex workers', all but 1 started sex work when they were over 17 years old. Childhood experiences were mixed with 7 women describing them as positive and 4 as negative. Half (n=7) of the escorts interviewed had experienced mental health issues and 57% had experienced domestic violence. However, most had a positive outlook towards their work, although 5 women suggested their work had a negative emotional impact on them (this was typically linked to loneliness and disrespectful clients). Low levels of drug use were reported. Women generally reported positive experiences with services (Laing and Irving, 2013: 10).

The research reported an interview with 1 male escort and 1 woman who had been "trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation."

Laing and Irving report that stakeholders (n=12) in the Tyne and Wear area had mixed knowledge about local sex markets and issues relating to sex work (2013:11). Knowledge was concentrated around 'survival/opportunistic' sex workers rather than escorts, and 'operational stakeholders' (women's projects, homelessness services, health services etc.) had the greatest knowledge of local sex markets.

Whilst most services said more needs to be done there is an acknowledgement that the quality of service provision to sex workers has improved dramatically over the years, all



services engage in multi-agency working and the GAP project was seen as the regional expert and their outreach and referral roles were deemed highly important by stakeholders.

All Tyne and Wear stakeholders in the PEER research supported the idea of a local sex work strategy to raise awareness, prioritise issues related to sex work within both their organisation and their individual roles and to drive forward local developments (Laing and Irving, 2013: 11).

Previous Peer research was undertaken in the North East of England by The Voices Heard Group (Voices Heard Group, Seeborn and Smiles 2008). This research focused on Sunderland, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Gateshead and North Tyneside, and was undertaken from May to October 2007. Through 86 peer interviews with male (n=22) and female sex workers (n=64), the research found:

- High levels of drug use - heroin, cocaine, crack, cannabis, alcohol, amphetamine, benzodiazepine, dihydrocodeine, subutex (temgesic), ketamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy;
- High levels of crime;
- High levels of homelessness or use of temporary accommodation;
- Low levels of condom use;
- Evidence of risky sexual behaviours;
- High reporting of physical and sexual assaults which were largely unreported to police by respondents;
- High reporting of physical pain through violent punters (57%);
- High reporting of mental health problems and emotional impact of sex work;
- Low level of use of family planning services (24.5%);
- Low level of use of GUM clinic (43% have visited GUM);
- One quarter believe they have caught STD through their work.

A number of research projects, commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation's Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse Programme, were conducted from 2006 to 2016 by Barefoot research and evaluation. This series of research studies explored sex work across Cumbria and the North East of England. These studies were mainly conducted through interviews with frontline professionals and online research (Barefoot 2016).

Research undertaken by Barefoot in Teesside (covering Middleborough, Stockton, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool) between 2012 and 2013 found that the most prominent

themes associated with sex work by frontline professionals were: substance misuse; the experience of violence (in many cases this was severe violence); poor accommodation or homelessness; poor health; removal of children into care; and debt (Barefoot 2013: 4). Barefoot (2013: 4)<sup>3</sup> also reported that the strongest service need for women involved in prostitution was suitable accommodation, followed by drug treatment, counselling and employment and training opportunities. The report states that whilst there is a “core of knowledge around Middlesbrough and Stockton about working with people involved in prostitution” there are some inconsistencies and gaps in training (2013:6). The research also reports that some services were supporting a small number destitute asylum seeking women, with no recourse to public funds, exchanging sex for a roof, money and food.

## **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in the North East**

Barnardo’s SECOS has been involved in an extensive amount of research and advocacy, particularly around child sexual exploitation since 1998, contributing to national debates, policy and practice on related topics such as the *Violence Against Women’s and Girl’s Strategy*, the *National Action Plan on CSE* (2012) and the *Office of the Children’s Commissioner report on Sexual Exploitation* (2013). Wendy Shepherd is currently updating a report on *Engaging and working with vulnerable children at risk of sexual exploitation: An updating of Barnardo’s 4 A’s Model*.

Some women in this participatory peer research (n=8) and in the Changing Lives peer research in Newcastle (n=7) said that they had sold sex before the age of 18. In addition to current practice operationalised in Teesside for supporting under 18s who are victims or at risk of sexual exploitation, the recent Home Office Home Affairs Select Committee report (2016) makes it very clear that government guidance should be developed for the police and local authorities on how to deal with young people at risk of involvement in sexual exploitation, or for those who were victims of sexual exploitation before the age of 18, after they reach 18, to ensure that they receive the support they need.

This raises important issues to be discussed regionally about young people in ‘transition’ between child and adult policy, legislation and services.

Barnardo’s (2012) guidance on helping local areas to tackle child sexual exploitation<sup>4</sup> is very clear that “multi-agency working underpins the development and implementation of any effective response to child sexual exploitation.” That Local Safeguarding Children Boards

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<sup>3</sup> A caveat. We have not commented on the statistical data in the 2013 report focusing on Teesside as the use of qualitative data mapping to predict the numbers involved in selling sex in a particular area is not a method we can evidence as reliable; double counting remains a risk as with gathering data from adult web-sites where people have more than one on-line identity.

<sup>4</sup> For information, and as part of the current landscape of child sexual exploitation, it is important to keep up to date with: the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse led by Hon. Dame Lowell Goddard, into the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have exercised their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse; and Police operations investigating historic sexual abuse as well as projects supporting historic victims.

should take a collaborative approach to identifying and tackling the issues and effective responses will involve:

- Raising awareness. *Young people and children, professionals, parents and carers will benefit from being informed about the issue.*
- Developing a strategic response. *Good practice shows that a response is best planned by multiple agencies, even if it is subsequently delivered by only one.*
- Providing victims of exploitation with appropriate support.
- Facilitating policing and prosecutions of perpetrators.

## **Regional Arts based work**

### **Open Clasp**

The region has a rich cultural tradition of arts based work dealing with pressing social issues and creative methods are gaining ground in social research.

We highlight the work of Open Clasp as the majority of their plays to date have included the needs, experiences and voices of marginalised women, women experiencing sexual and domestic violence, women's experiences of prison and the experiences of women who sell sex. Open Clasp conduct extensive research for their plays in a similar way to an ethnographic researcher, the writing and performances that emerge have the voices of the women they interview and talk-to embedded in the work. Rattle and Roll (2010) focused specifically on 'survival' sex work and toured for eight weeks in February and March 2010. <http://www.openclasp.org.uk/>

Changing Lives are committed to participatory and peer ways of working and have undertaken visual/photographic work with vulnerable young people.

Nationally, there have been many interesting creative developments since O'Neill and Campbell<sup>5</sup> (2000) *Working Together to Create Change: Safety Soapbox* used creative methods to consult female sex workers and residents in Walsall, West Midlands and supported *Sex, Lies and Love*, a theatre based and photographic project exploring sexual exploitation. O'Neill and Campbell (2000) argued that visual re-presentations can often have a much more powerful effect than words alone, and feed into local and national social and cultural policy. They worked with Walsall community arts to consult residents, sex workers and young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

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<sup>5</sup> See O'Neill, M., and Campbell, R. (2000). *Working Together To Create Change: Walsall Prostitution Consultation Research*, Walsall South Health Action Zone/Staffordshire University/Liverpool Hope University. [http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/art\\_and\\_design/safetysoapbox/menu.htm](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/art_and_design/safetysoapbox/menu.htm)

Professor Nick Mai<sup>6</sup> uses his anthropological and film making skills to present the experiences of migrant sex workers. The sex workers opera opened at the Arcola Theatre in London in 2016<sup>7</sup>, the sex work film festival<sup>8</sup> (exploring the representation of sex workers in film) ran in Leicester for the first time in 2015 and the hooker monologues<sup>9</sup> opened in Vancouver, Canada in March 2016.

## Cleveland Police Data

A publically available freedom of information request to Cleveland Police shows the policing activity towards sex work over a four year period from 2010 to 2014. The breakdown of people arrested correlates with the findings of the on-street section of this research with males of all ages from age 15 to age 69 purchasing or attempting to purchase sex. The females arrested for selling sex are mostly in their twenties/early thirties with an age range of 23 – 44 (see Figure 1).

Age Range	Female	Male
Under 16		1
16 - 21		13
22 - 34	66	43
35- 49	13	47
50+		27
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>134</b>

Figure 1: Cleveland Police data from 01/01/2010 – 31/12/2014 showing age range of arrestees

The table below (Figure 2) offers a breakdown of the offences males and females were arrested for:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://kingston.academia.edu/NicolaMai>

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.arcolatheatre.com/event/sex-workers-opera/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.leicesterredproject.co.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://hookermonologues.blogspot.co.uk/p/about.html>

<sup>10</sup> Please note the change in disposal codes that have occurred over this time period, most notably in autumn 2011 where prostitution/soliciting charges were expanded upon on the police data system, and new 'loitering' charge was coded.

*Under Section 16 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 it is an offence for a person (whether male or female) persistently to loiter or solicit in a street or public place for the purposes of offering services as a prostitute. This came into effect from 1 April 2010 and amended section 1 of the Street Offences Act 1959 which earlier outlawed soliciting and loitering. Under this amendment the term "common prostitute" was replaced by "person" (first time a gender neutral term) and the term "persistently" was added. Conduct is persistent, for the purposes of this offence, if it takes place on two or more occasions in any period of three months.*

*Under Section 51A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 it is an offence for a person in a street or public place to solicit another (B) for the purpose of obtaining B's sexual services as a prostitute. The reference to a person in a street or public place includes a person in a motor vehicle in a street or public place. This replaced the offences of kerb crawling and persistent soliciting under sections 1 and 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 1985 and came into effect from 1 April 2010. A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to a fine*

Arrest Charge	Female	Male	Grand Total
Common Prostitute Loitering In Street Or Public Place	12		12
Common Prostitute Soliciting In Street Or Public Place	4		4
Person Persistently Loiter For The Purposes Of Prostitution (Recordable)	28	1	29
Person Persistently Solicit For The Purposes Of Prostitution (Recordable)	22	1	23
Prostitution	11	1	12
Solicit Another For The Purpose Of Obtaining Their Sexual Services As A Prostitute In A Street / Public Place	2	56	58
Solicit Another For The Purpose Of Obtaining Their Sexual Services As A Prostitute In A Street/ Public Place (Recordable)		1	1
Solicit Woman For Prostitution		8	8
Solicit Woman From Vehicle – Kerb crawling		2	2
Soliciting By Male		64	64
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>213</b>

Figure 2: Cleveland Police data from 01/01/2010 – 31/12/2014

In total over this period females selling sex make up 37.1% of the arrestees (n=79), with 62.9% of police arrests directed towards men buying sex. However, a breakdown over the 4 years (Figure 3) highlights the shift over time in enforcement activity with the number of women arrested in 2011 doubling from 5 the previous year, to 10. This number of women arrested in 2012, 2013 and 2014 further expands to nearly 4 times the number arrested in 2010 (n = 23, 19 and 22, respectively).

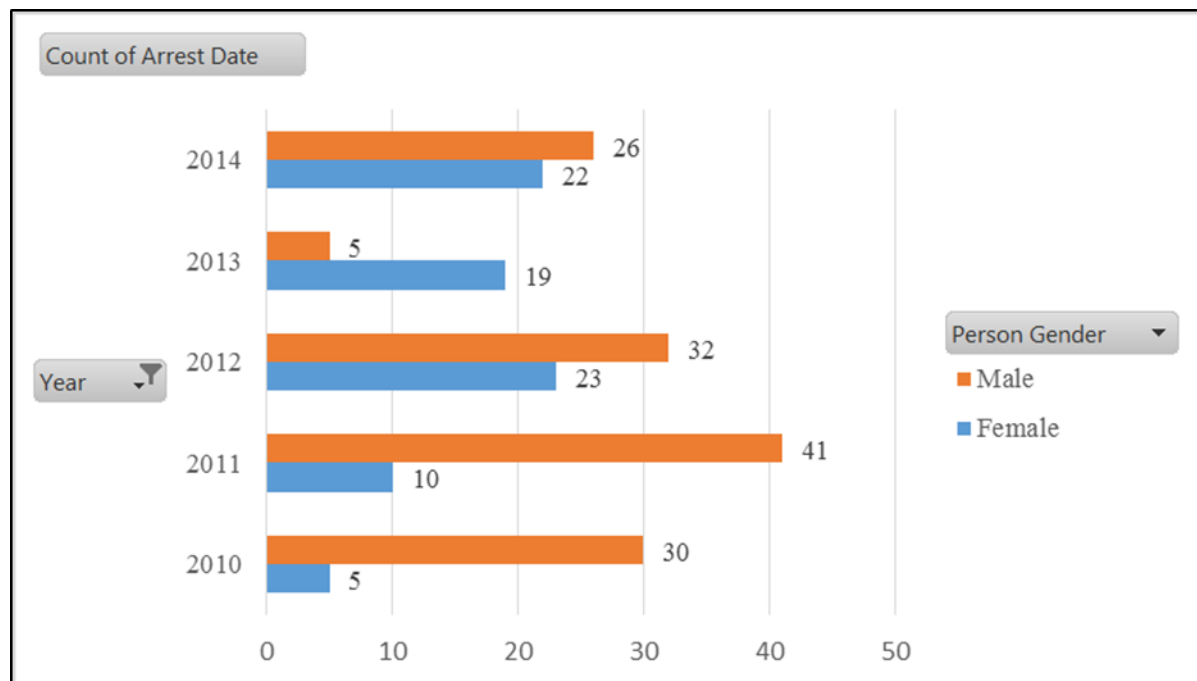


Figure 3: Arrestees for sex work related offences in Cleveland over a four year period, broken down by gender.

What is of particular interest is the disposal for each arrestee, as shown in Figure 4. Whilst males might be more proactively targeted 31.3% of males arrested (n = 42) receive no further action. Comparing this to women, 98.7% of women arrested receive charge, summons or caution. Only 1 woman received no further action. Of the numbers charged, again women fare worse with 96.2% (n = 76) of all female arrestees receiving this disposal, compared to 20.1% (n = 27) of males. Compare this to a summons and more males (n = 16) are given this option compared to females who are charged (and therefore go through the custody process) only 1 female arrest was disposed of by means of a summons.

Row Labels	Female	Male	Grand Total
CHARGE	76	27	103
CAUTION	1	19	20
SUMMONS	1	16	17
NFA	1	42	43
BAIL		30	30
Grand Total	79	134	213

Figure 4: Disposal outcomes of all sex work related offences recorded by Cleveland Police 2010 – 2014 broken down by gender.

## National Research, Law and Policy

There is a vast, rich and growing research literature on: the sex industry (Sanders *et al*, 2009), histories of prostitution and sex work both at home (Walkowitz, 1980; Self, 2004) and internationally (Abel *et al*, 2010, ); violence, abuse and hate crime (Kinnell, 2008; Boff, 2012; Campbell, 2014); leaving sex work (O'Neill and Campbell, 2010, Hester and Westmarland, 2004; internet based sex work (Sanders, et al 2015<sup>11</sup>) as well as sexual trafficking (Mai, 2013, Jobe, 2008a, 2008b) sexual exploitation and child sexual exploitation (CSE) (Allnock *et al*, 2015; Berelowitz *et al*, 2012; Barnardo's SECOS, 2010; Pearce, 2009). It is not possible to do full justice to this literature in this report.

Focusing on adult sex work, debates, including feminist debates, are polarised around sex as work and sex as violence and abuse with people and organisations often taking a moral stance, which is in turn, embedded in the history of law and policy responses to adult sex work in the UK (O'Neill 2001, 2010). Various leading trade unions and organisations such as the Mothers Union, Amnesty and the Lancet have called for the de-criminalisation of adult sex work.

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<sup>11</sup> See also an ESRC funded project *Beyond the Gaze* led by Teela Sanders and Jane Scoular on 'the working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK' at: <http://beyond-the-gaze.com/resources/>

Much of the available research in the UK has been undertaken by academics, scholars and researchers affiliated to the Sex Work Research Hub (SWRH)<sup>12</sup>, launched at Durham University in 2014 and now housed at the University of York.

The SWRH works with sex workers, sex work support projects and other stakeholders, such as lawyers, police, policy makers, educationalists, youth and community workers, to support and develop research that is rigorous, high quality, as well as delivering tangible public benefit and impact. The principles underpinning participatory research are central to the work of the SWRH.

## Law and Policy

### Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee Interim Report

On July 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 the Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee headed by MP Keith Vaz, published the long awaited interim report.

The report calls for the criminalization of sex workers to end, in that soliciting should no longer be a criminal offence and that sex workers may legally share premises. Final recommendations are deferred until later in the year.

*“This is the first time that Parliament has considered the issue of prostitution in the round for decades. It is a polarising subject with strong views on all sides.*

*As a first step, there has been universal agreement that elements of the present law are unsatisfactory. Treating soliciting as a criminal offence is having an adverse effect, and it is wrong that sex workers, who are predominantly women, should be penalised and stigmatised in this way. The criminalisation of sex workers should therefore end.”*

The report opens with a key facts section:

- Around 11% of British men aged 16–74 have paid for sex on at least one occasion, which equates to 2.3 million individuals;
- The number of sex workers in the UK is estimated to be around 72,800 with about 32,000 working in London;
- Sex workers have an average of 25 clients per week paying an average of £78 per visit;
- In 2014–15, there were 456 prosecutions of sex workers for loitering and soliciting;

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/current-research/swrh/>

- An estimated 152 sex workers were murdered between 1990 and 2015. 49% of sex workers (in one survey) said that they were worried about their safety.

In Brooks-Gordon's evidence to the select committee (2015) she estimates there to be around 72,800 sex workers in the UK with approximately 32,000 working in London. The Home Office (2016) reports an estimated 60,000 and 80,000, the majority are women, working either on the streets, or more commonly now in a variety of indoor environments.

National Ugly Mugs (NUM) evidence to the select committee states that sex workers were often victims of crime, but rarely reported these incidents to the police:

Almost 2000 reports have been made to NUM since July 2012, but only 25% of the victims were willing to formally report to the police. Of these, 283 were rapes, 86 were attempted rapes and 150 were other sexual assaults. Our 2015 survey with Leeds University found that 49% of sex workers are "worried" or "very worried" about their safety and 47% have been targeted by offenders. Yet 49% were either "unconfident" or "very unconfident" that police would take their reports seriously.

The report commends *"the police service for its focus on protecting sex workers, and for seeking to gain their assistance in targeting those who exploit them or commit other crimes"* but acknowledges there is considerable variation and not all is consistent with national policy".

Referring to violence and abuse, barriers to exit and the impact of criminalisation the report states:

*"It is wrong that sex workers, who are predominantly women, should be criminalised, and therefore stigmatised and penalised, in this way. The current law on brothel-keeping also means that some sex workers are often too afraid of prosecution to work together at the same premises and as a result often compromise their safety and put themselves at considerable risk by working alone."*

*"We therefore recommend that, at the earliest opportunity, the Home Office change existing legislation so that soliciting is no longer an offence and so that brothel-keeping provisions allow sex workers to share premises, without losing the ability to prosecute those who use brothels to control or exploit sex workers. There must be zero tolerance of the organised criminal exploitation of sex workers."*

The report goes on to state that The Home Office *"should also legislate for the deletion of previous convictions and cautions for prostitution from the record of sex workers by amending the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act."*

The final report *"will consider the purposes of the law on prostitution and what the research shows about how those purposes can best be fulfilled, including whether a different approach should be taken to on-street and off-street prostitution"*.



## National Policing Sex Work Guidance 2016

In February 2016 the National Police Chiefs Council publishes new Guidance on Policing Sex Work.<sup>13</sup>

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) with the College of Policing has agreed to this revised guidance being circulated to Police Forces in England, Wales & Northern Ireland and adopted by Police Forces in England & Wales, December 2015.

*"The last National Guidance looking at Prostitution was produced in 2011 and highlighted the high profile and tragic series of sex worker murders in Ipswich and Bradford. However, the murder of sex workers continues to take place at an alarming rate. At the time of writing this guidance, 152 sex workers have been murdered in the UK since 1990. This figure represents an appalling human cost in itself but fails to quantify the full scale of violent attacks on sex workers that fall short of homicide."*

The guidance offers "practical and meaningful advice" to Police Services and 'Strategic Enforcement' that seeks to build consensus between "sex workers, outreach and support networks, local communities and the Police" as well as "the public protection duty that police services have in relation to the safety of sex workers and practical ways to address crimes against sex workers". Whilst recognising "local operational independence and autonomy of commanders" practices are highlighted that can erode confidence in the context of the complex challenges of policing sex work. It recommends that the term Vice' is "not professional nor acceptable for modern day police forces" and sets out a strategy for policing sex work that is based upon developing relationships between the Police, local outreach and support networks and individual sex workers. The strategic aims are:

- Protect individuals and communities from the risk, harm and exploitation within the sex industry;
- Investigate and disrupt organised criminal activity;
- Support or create effective partnerships with other agencies, organisations and individuals, which help to minimise or eliminate the harm that can be caused through prostitution to individuals and communities;
- Undertake, support or promote relevant research which furthers the ambitions of this guidance;
- Support national policy and law makers in creating policies and laws that protect victims and communities, whilst making it easier to successfully prosecute those who abuse, exploit and coerce sex workers.

The guidance also states that as the vast majority of crimes against sex workers will not have been reported to the police that the National Ugly Mugs scheme should be made use of

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=National+Police+Chiefs+Council+publishes+new+Guidance+on+Policing+Sex+Work>

alongside appointing “*police sex work liaison officers who can play a key role in building trust, encouraging reporting, liaise with victims and sex work projects, supporting investigations and advising other police staff*” (2015:19).

## **Key legislation (England and Wales) up to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016**

The selling and purchase of sex is currently legal in the England and Wales. However, a number of activities relating to the practice of selling and purchase of sex are prohibited under current legislation. Illegal activities include:

- Persistent soliciting or loitering in a street or public place for the purposes of offering services as a prostitute (Policing and Crime Act 2009: s16);

Under this offence conduct is considered to be persistent if it takes place on two or more occasions in any period of three months. Two officers need to witness the activity and administer a non-statutory “*prostitutes caution*” in the first instance (Crown Prosecution Service, 2016). If convicted, an “*Engagement and Support Order*” (Policing and Crime Act, 2009: s.17) may be offered in lieu of a fine. The offender is required to attend three meetings within six months with an “*appropriate person*” in order to “*a) address the conduct constituting the offence and b) find ways to cease engaging in such conduct in the future*” (CPS, 2016). Failure to comply with an ESO will result in a breach, which may involve resentencing. Following a breach, more punitive sanctions may be used by police including Anti-Social Behavior Orders, Drug Treatment Orders, fines or arrest.

- Soliciting another person in a street or public place for the purpose of obtaining sexual services (Sexual Offences Act 2003: s51a).

This offence relates to a person in a street or public place (including a motor vehicle) soliciting another person for the purpose of obtaining a sexual service. Offenders are usually subject to a fine (CPS, 2016).

- Keeping, managing, acting or assisting in the management of a brothel (Section 33A Sexual Offences Act 2003).

Under this legislation a “brothel” is defined as “more than one woman using premises for the purposes of prostitution, either simultaneously or one at a time” (CPS, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016). Where sex workers work individually from a property, this does not constitute a “brothel”. To remain within the law, sex workers must not work collaboratively with other sex workers from the same property. The CPS suggests it is in the public interest for brothel keepers to be prosecuted (CPS, 2016)

- Causing, Inciting and Controlling Prostitution for Gain (Sections 52 & 53 Sexual Offences Act 2003).

These offences apply to anyone who causes or incites another person to become a prostitute (Sexual Offences Act: s52), or controls another person's activities relating to their prostitution for financial advantage (Sexual Offences Act, s53).

- Paying for sexual services where a person has been coerced/forced/ deceived into providing sexual services (Sexual Offences Act 2003: s53A; Policing and Crime Act 2009: s14)

Under this legislation a person (A) commits an offence if he/she makes or promises payment for the sexual services of a prostitute (B) who has been coerced/forced/ deceived by C to provide these sexual services. A's knowledge or otherwise of C's exploitative activity is irrelevant. The penalty for this offence is a fine (CPS, 2016).

### **Other relevant legislation includes:**

- Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation (Sexual Offences Act 2003: s57-59);
- The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Sexual Offences Act 2003: s47, s48, s49, s50);
- Placing of adverts relating to prostitution in telephone boxes (Section 46(1) Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001: s46(1).

### **Key international criminal justice approaches**

A model of neo-abolitionism was adopted in Sweden in 1999 (followed by Norway in 2008; Iceland in 2009; Northern Ireland in 2014, with partial adoption in Canada in 2014). In the 'Swedish or Nordic' model, the purchase of sex is illegal but it is no longer a crime to sell sex. This approach criminalises those who purchase commercial sex and provides sex workers with support services that are focused on exiting sex work.

While the "Swedish model" has been considered a success by some authors due to an apparent reduction in street sex work<sup>14</sup> (Equality Now, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016; Swedish Ministry of Justice, 2010), other authors have suggested that these apparent measures of success are based on "unreliable estimates" and that street sex work may have moved indoors, online or to neighbouring countries (Levy and Jacobson, 2014: 597). Levy and Jacobson's 2014 study which interviewed sex workers in Sweden found that for sex workers the Swedish approach to sex work has led to:

- Increased risks and experiences of violence;
- Decreased negotiating power for safer sex practices;

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<sup>14</sup> The Swedish Ministry of Justice reports that street prostitution in Sweden has not increased compared to other countries over a similar time period.

- Clients being less likely to report violence they witness against sex workers;
- More aggressive policing of sex work;
- Strong legal incentives to avoid condom use;
- Increased discrimination from health providers;
- Lack of harm reduction services due to services focusing on exit;
- Increased difficulties in accessing and maintaining housing;
- Inadequate social service provision (no condoms) (Levy and Jacobson, 2014)

Sex work was decriminalised in New Zealand in 2003, where the 2003 Prostitution Reform Act made it legal for over 18s to buy or sell sex and all provisions that criminalise aspects of sex work were removed. Since 2003, sex workers in New Zealand, have the same occupational and legal rights as any group. A review of the act has shown that decriminalization has been successful in making the industry safer and improving the human rights of sex workers within all sectors of the industry (Abel, 2014).

In other countries sex work is permitted under certain state-specified conditions. Examples include Red Light Districts in The Netherlands and Belgium; specified zones in Switzerland; licensed brothels in Nevada in the United States, and in Victoria and Queensland in Australia. The impact of such legalisation on the safety and working conditions of sex workers has been variable, depending upon local implementation. In the Netherlands, Wagenaar and Altink (2012) argue that a poor implementation of reforms following the lift of the ban on brothels in 2000, accompanied by lack of proper monitoring, has led to variable working conditions and labour rights for sex workers. Elsewhere, Pitcher and Wijers (2014) argue that legalisation has not resulted in significant improvements to sex workers' labour position, but rather increased controls within the legitimate sector and created a dual system in which illegal workers have become increasingly disenfranchised.

## **Current social policy debates in the UK**

The recently published interim report on prostitution from the Home Office Home Affairs select committee will lead to further debate and consultation on both law and social policy in relation to adult sex work in particular. Until July 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 the social policy debates in the UK are constituted as follows:

Following the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Policing and Crime Act 2009, criminal justice approaches in England and Wales follow elements of the "Swedish model" (Scoular and Carline, 2014) with a focus on criminalising clients, through laws on soliciting (Sexual Offences Act 2003: s51a) and the introduction of a strict liability offence if sex workers have been subject to force (Sexual Offences Act 2003: s53A; Policing and Crime Act 2009: s14),

and a focus on the rehabilitation of sex workers through Engagement and Support Orders (Policing and Crime Act 2009: s16).

However, the social policy debates in the UK on how to best manage sex work are ongoing with numerous recent social policy developments, including the following<sup>15</sup>:

- 2012: In Scotland, Rhoda Grant, MSP, Highlands and Islands, attempted fast track to introduce Nordic model. The motion went to consultation but was defeated.
- 2014: MEP Mary Honeyball produced a report recommending the introduction of the “Swedish Model” and the Europe Parliament subsequently voted in favour of a resolution to criminalise the buyer. However, the European vote is not binding in the UK and has been strongly resisted by academics and practitioners working in the field, including the Mothers Union, the Lancet and Amnesty International, who are in favour of de-criminalisation of sex work.
- 2014 Gavin Shuker, MP for Luton South, chaired the *All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade*, which produced a report and recommendations for the introduction of the blanket criminalisation of all clients. The report was later somewhat discredited as there was reluctance to disclose the evidence base that the report used.
- 2014: Fiona MacTaggart, MP for Slough, put forward an amendment to the Modern Slavery Bill, which would have introduced the blanket criminalisation of clients. The amendment was defeated.
- 2014: An independent commissioner role was created [Kevin Hyland] by the Modern Day Slavery Act and a strategic plan was due to be developed in 2015. Academics wrote to request not using this as a way of introducing the “Swedish model”.
- 2015: On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015 it became a criminal offence to purchase sex in Northern Ireland (Human Trafficking and Exploitation bill 2015: clause 6). Offenders are subject to a maximum penalty of one year in prison and a fine of £1000.
- 2015/2016: Jean Urquhart undertook a consultation on sex work and proposed a bill to decriminalise sex work in Scotland. The bill is currently held up until after election.
- 2015: ECP and Scot Pep held consultations in the houses of parliament – the London ECP event was hosted by John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party and the Green Party support the introduction of decriminalization.

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<sup>15</sup> With thanks to Val Gore, Josephine Butler Society for helpful communication.

- 2015/ 2016: Amnesty International proposed and subsequently adopted a policy to recognise sex worker's rights as human rights, and campaign for the decriminalisation of sex work.
- 2016 February National Police Chiefs Council publishes new Guidance on Policing Sex Work which calls for policing which prioritises the safety of sex workers focusing of protection and not enforcement which is identified as problematic
- 2016 A sex worker in Ireland has raised monies through crowd funding, aiming to get the Northern Ireland legislation repealed. The hearing in Belfast High Court has been put on hold until September 2016.
- 2016 Keith Vaz chaired the Home Affairs Select Committee cross party consultation on prostitution. This report was published July 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 and may lead to far reaching changes in legislation, policy and practice.

Also contributing towards the social policy debates in the UK are: National Ugly Mugs (UKNSWP), key sex worker organisations, The English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) in England and Scot-Pep in Scotland, The Sex Work Open University and the Sex Work Research Hub constituted by UK and Irish Universities and researchers/practitioners.

All of these organisations produce briefing papers and respond to government consultations on sex work.

## **UK Network of Sex Work Projects research and toolkits**

The UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP) until recently was a national independent organisation supporting sex workers and sex work projects; it has now renamed National Ugly Mugs (UKNSWP) to reflect a key part of its work.

The UKNSWP aimed to improve public policy through direct knowledge of how policy impacts on sex worker's lives (<http://www.uknswp.org/about/>).

The UKNSWP provided resources for sex workers, including a directory of services (UKNSWP, 2007) and safety advice (UKNSWP, 2008a). The UKNSWP has also produced good practice guidance for working with sex workers (2008b; 2008c; 2008c; 2008d; 2008e), and best practice guidance focused on Ugly Mugs schemes (UKNSWP 2011).

The UKNSWP good practice guidance advises that services for sex workers should be holistic, needs based and non-judgemental (UKNSWP, 2008c). Outreach work should recognise the complexities of sex work and the diversity of the sex worker population to ensure equal access to support services and advice (UKNSWP, 2008b).

UKNSWP guidance<sup>16</sup> (2008C) suggests that the following issues should be considered when undertaking comprehensive assessments and preparing care/support plans for service users.

- Access to drugs treatment;
- Access to education, training and employment;
- Access to health care including mental health services;
- Support for housing needs;
- Support where service users have criminal records;
- Access to benefits and financial advice;
- Support with families and relationships;
- Support for domestic abuse and violence.

The delivery of good practice across these key areas may support service users to exit sex work and UKNSWP suggest that partnership working with key agencies locally and nationally is necessary to deliver a gold standard of support across these areas (UKNSWP 2008C).

UKNSWP suggest that services focused on assisting sex workers to exit sex work should be service user led and exiting should be supported as part of a broader range of services, including harm reduction services as appropriate.

*“If the services and professionals involved dictate the process, sex workers will feel alienated from it, particularly if they are struggling to comply. Sex workers may then feel isolated from the essential harm reduction services that they should be entitled to, and become more invisible and marginalised.”* (UKNSWP 2008C: 3)

NUM (UKNSWP) is a formal partner in the UK wide Beyond the Gaze (BTG) research project, the largest UK project to date examining the working conditions, safety and regulation of internet based sex work. <http://beyond-the-gaze.com/> In 2017 BTG with NUM will produce national good practice guidance for working with internet based sex workers.

## **The National Ugly Mugs (UKNSWP) Scheme**

The National Ugly Mugs Scheme (NUMS/UKNSWP) takes reports of violent incidents from sex workers and disseminates anonymised warnings directly to sex workers and front line support workers throughout the UK. The aims of the National Ugly Mugs scheme are to:

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<sup>16</sup> There is a gold standard of practice outlined for each of these areas  
<http://www.uknswp.org/wp-content/uploads/GPG5.pdf>

- Improve the safety of sex workers, and reduce crimes committed against them by alerting them to dangerous individuals;
- Systematically record and monitor crimes against sex workers;
- Enable third party reporting of crimes against sex workers;
- Assist sex workers, where possible, to report assaults to the police;
- Improve liaison between sex workers, the police and sex work projects;
- Contribute to successful investigations & convictions of those who commit crimes against sex workers;
- Deliver the message that any violence against sex workers is unacceptable and criminal. (UKNSP, 2011: 6)

The pilot of the National Ugly Mugs Scheme (NUMS), which took place from 2012 to 2013, was evaluated positively by sex workers and sex work projects with most sex workers and project workers reporting that their expectations of the pilot scheme had been met. (Laing, Pitcher and Irving, 2013: 4). Laing, Pitcher and Irving (2013) report in an evaluation of the pilot scheme that:

- Sex workers indicated they were more likely to report crimes;
- The scheme had improved the safety of sex workers by providing sex workers with information on potentially dangerous individuals;
- Increased intelligence provided through NUMS had made a valuable contribution to police investigations of crimes against sex workers;
- NUMS had contributed to the apprehension and charging of some offenders;
- NUMS sends a message to potential offenders that coordinated action is being taken to identify and apprehend people who commit crimes against sex workers.

A more recent impact report from the NUMS (NUMS 2015) reports an increase of 29%, from the previous year, in sex workers reporting violent incidents to the scheme. 90% of reports made to the scheme were shared with police and 80,000 potentially life-saving SMS Alerts were sent to Sex Workers nationwide.



## Section Two. Methodology & Research Process

Participatory methods of research work directly with local people to design, conduct the research, analyse and write up of the research findings.

Participatory research emphasises transparent models, working together to create change and uses a module of working that encourages the stereotypical 'subjects' of research to be involved as community co-researchers, to feel involved and produce the kind of information necessary to carry policy forward, whilst at the same time marking out a clear path for implementation.

As a tool participatory research, in this case Peer research:

- Values the role of peers, their knowledge and understanding;
- Gives community stakeholders a key role in developing new knowledge and understanding, as well as ideas for change.

This process was summed up by O'Neill and Webster (2005)

*"In lots of communities cynicism has already started to settle in. No matter how many times people are consulted nothing ever seems to change. It is often remarked that 'no one ever hears the results or gets feedback'. Why is it that despite being consulted some communities do not feel listened to?" (O'Neill and Webster, 2005:1)*

Participatory and in this case peer research is an approach to research and consultation that aims to incorporate the voices and views of the various communities involved, to directly feed into service delivery and policy making.

It is a methodology that takes people as its starting point. It goes out to where they are and shapes itself to meet their needs. It engages with the imagination and prompts individuals and communities to move out of old, rigid ways of doing things and look for new solutions. It is fundamentally about change.

Not only do local people feel listened to, quite often they feel in control. It is a methodology which aims to overcome the problems associated with many traditional non-participatory research models which often have difficulty in engaging with 'hard to engage' groups and result in documents containing recommendations neither supported nor endorsed by the communities they are intended to benefit. (O'Neill and Webster, 2005:1)

## Participatory Peer Research: Principles, Processes and Tools

The approach we used in this project can be summarised below:

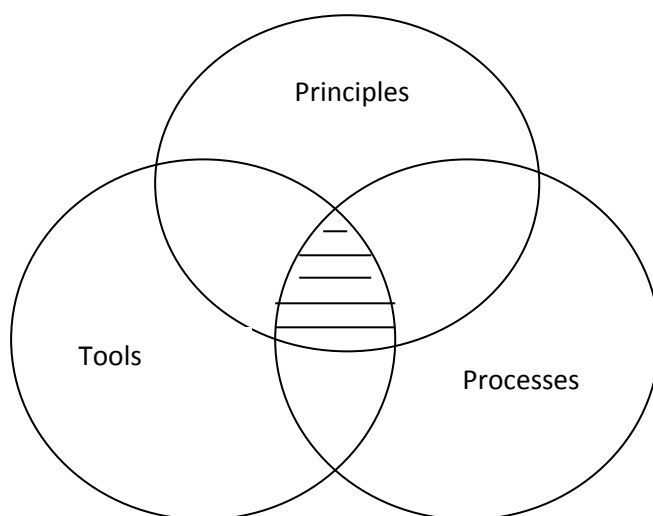


Diagram taken from O'Neill and Webster, 2005:1.

In the diagram, the shaded area represents the point at which a balance is achieved between the three elements and where effective participatory research occurs.

a) Principles underlying the work share a value base in emphasising the importance of valuing sex workers, stakeholder and their contribution, and also putting at the forefront notions of engaged participation, inclusiveness, access and empowerment as key elements that underline all work.

b) The Tools are the activities themselves that are used to engage people. These include focus groups, interviews, creative methods, group workshops and a range of other techniques. The tools themselves share some of the techniques associated with more traditional methods of social research but they emphasise participation and shared decision-making. So, training and working with community members themselves as researchers, sharing back the results of findings with community groups, stakeholder workshops or focus groups, in order that they are involved in developing action plans based on research findings.

c).Processes refer to the project management process or the research or consultation process. Most traditional research methods exclude community members from the project cycle. Participatory research actively involves community members in all stages of the process, these include:

- Defining the issues;
- Planning the appropriate research tools and techniques;

- The questions that need to be addressed;
- Interpretation of findings;
- The development of the action plan;
- The implementation of the action plan.

Clearly these processes are again informed by the principles underpinning participatory research projects and when combined with appropriate methods and techniques provide a balanced approach to project implementation<sup>17</sup>.

## PEER 2 PEER [PAR]

Hidden Lives of Female Sex Workers in Stockton was set up to reflect a balance between principles, tools and processes and is based on the following principles:

- Inclusion
- Participation
- Valuing All Voices
- Community Driven Outcomes

Participatory Action Research or Peer research PAR is a methodology which encompasses research, and interventions or action. It seeks to develop purposeful knowledge leading to social change.

PAR is also a tool for including people's participation in the production of knowledge and understanding through:

- **Collective research** (participants as co-researchers. The sum of knowledge from participants, stakeholder and academics/researchers allows us to acquire a much more accurate picture of the reality we want to transform);
- **Critical recovery of history** (combining academic knowledge and practical knowledge and reflecting back over the history of a community, in this case adult sex work in Teesside);
- **Valuing all voices** (democratic process – mutual recognition);
- **Producing and exchanging new knowledge** (the element of creative surprise is central to advancing knowledge more likely to emerge in the PAR process).

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<sup>17</sup> This research project was managed by A Way Out and does not represent the balance recommended in the diagram. There were some challenges documented later in this section

Taken together, the expertise of women who sell or swap sex, the project workers in A Way Out and Barnardo's SECOS and the research expertise of academics make for a productive research partnership.

PAR involves a commitment to research that:

- Develops partnership responses to developing purposeful knowledge;
- Includes all those involved where possible, thus facilitating shared ownership of the development and outcomes of the research;
- Inclusion involves working with participants as co-researchers;
- Uses innovative ways of consulting and working with local people, for example through mapping and walking methods to understand the local community;
- Is transformative.

PAR is a process and a practice directed towards social change *with* the participants. It is interventionist, action oriented, and interpretive.

## **What is the impact of PAR?**

Working together enables people to have their voices heard, to raise awareness, contribute to knowledge on an issue - to work together to create change and feed into service planning and delivery as well as policy making.

## **PAR / PEER Training**

Five training sessions were delivered to the community co researchers and project workers. One training session was delivered to volunteers working with AWO and the Project Manager Colleen Bilton attended a two day PAR training at Durham University organised by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action.

At the first training session we used *creative methods* to evaluate the women's engagement in and enjoyment of the training but also to find out how they felt about the research, how important it was to them. The women were asked to create a sculpture that expressed how they felt about the research and what they wanted to get out of it. The cover image for this report illustrates the images created. The images largely represent partnership working, building bridges and working together with stakeholders to address the issues they experience, the stigma and violence and feeling trapped as well as the aspirations and hopes for the future.

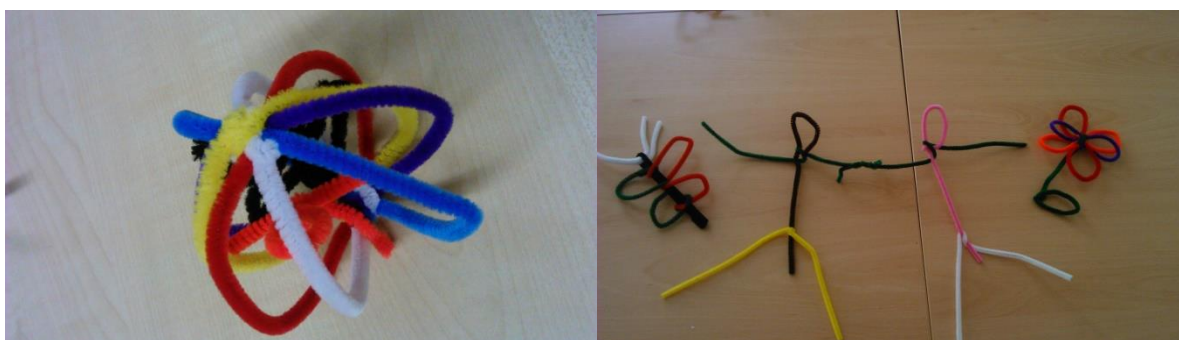


Figure 5. Images of the sculptures made by the women to show how they felt about the research project: 'working together, partnerships and being valued as a person'.

The participant information sheet, consent form, topic guide and questionnaire were developed jointly with the community co researchers and project workers.

The training with volunteers was filmed by Sage Publications as an example of good practice in participatory research. This film is accessible on their web site autumn 2016.

## The Training Sessions

The training sessions delivered to this project included:

- WHAT is Peer Research / PAR?
- KEY ingredients of Peer Research /PAR?
- WHAT do we want to find out in our research and WHY?
- HOW can we do this together?
- CREATING the tools and understanding ethics of peer research.

## Skills Training over five modules/sessions<sup>18</sup>

- Understanding PAR/PEER Research;
- Interview techniques (learning by doing, top tips, active listening, repeating back key points, taking notes, keeping eye contact/interest./body language);
- Ethics/Risk and Safeguarding;
- Designing a questionnaire;
- Designing an interview guide for sex workers and other experts;

<sup>18</sup> We discussed the fact that this training could possibly link with befriending skills, communication skills and understanding safeguarding from NOCN Level 1 and hence be developed as a NOCN module.

- A day in your life ... mapping sex work in Stockton & Middlesbrough (this was only completed in Stockton)

## **Participatory Research Methods: Process, Impact and Challenges**

### **Process**

Colleen Bilton was appointed to manage the research from A Way Out.

12 people completed the Peer training: 5 current or former sex workers, 5 project workers and 2 volunteers.

5 community researchers were recruited by A Way Out and 1 from Barnardo's SECOS.

A buddy system was put in place where community co-researchers conducted interviews in twos (usually with a buddy - a project worker or volunteer), so 2 people would then share the role of interviewing, taking notes, listening and responding/promoting.

Most of the stakeholder interviews were conducted by Colleen Bilton, community co-researchers Kath and Hannah, as well as Dr. Kelly Stockdale or Prof. Maggie O'Neill.

The off street interviews were conducted by one community co-researcher Hannah, with Colleen Bilton as research buddy.

The on street interviews were conducted by a number of community co-researchers, with the majority conducted at A Way Out in Stockton, with a small number being undertaken at a street based voluntary sector agency in Middlesbrough and by Barnardo's SECOS (n=4). The smaller number in Middlesbrough was due to declining numbers of women working on street.

### **Impact**

Participatory research is time consuming in that it develops partnership approaches and seeks to include all those involved where possible, thus facilitating shared ownership of the development and outcomes of the research. Working with participants as co-researchers values their expertise and taken together, the knowledge of community members and academic researchers is greater than the sum of the parts. Participatory methods foster local ownership and effective communication with communities and key stakeholders.

### **Challenges**

There are, inevitably, challenges involved in undertaking participatory research, especially when the research is led by community co-researchers supported by organisations whose primary role is service delivery. Changing circumstances in the lives of some of the community researchers impacted on the number of interviews completed.

Some of the community researchers initially recruited and trained to deliver interviews faced personal setbacks, including eviction, loss of benefits, personal bereavements, relapse into substance misuse, and involvement with the criminal justice system. For one woman moving forward with her life meant moving away from the area.

The problems the community researchers experienced connected with individual lifestyles, health issues and a lack of social support networks are well documented in the literature. Nevertheless, community co-researchers undertook a significant number of interviews.

For some sex workers who had exited, researchers carefully considered any risks those women may be exposed to in carrying out the research.

A Way Out made counselling available to the community co-researchers and the interviewees.

The recruitment of the community researchers was impacted by an initiative by Cleveland Police targeting kerb crawlers, i.e., Operation Grayling, where a number of men were arrested and charged. This led to a reduced street presence of women. A Way Out responded by doing additional outreach.

The participatory process did not run through the entire trajectory of the research in that only 2 of the peer researchers undertook interviews with stakeholders and only 1 community co-researcher was directly involved in data analysis and contributed to the writing up. This was due to changing circumstances in the lives of some of the community researchers as well as changes in staffing at A Way Out.

In hindsight a better balance would have been achieved between principles, tools and processes, if the research team at Durham had greater involvement in managing the research and the time and resources to become embedded in A Way Out, offering on the ground support to both the buddies and the community co-researchers.

## **Mapping and walking the places and spaces of sex work in Stockton and Middlesbrough**

One way of understanding the geography of street sex work and how the spaces of street sex work might impact on the lives of women selling sex, but also to gain an understanding of where the services providing support to women are located, is to map the relevant spaces and places and walk with sex workers living and working there.

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 2015 at the close of one of the training sessions, two of the peer researchers created maps of the spaces and places that were part of their everyday lives, including the services they used and where they worked. We asked them to talk us through an everyday route they might take from home or from A Way Out/SECOS Barnardo's.

One of the peer researchers walked us through her map of Stockton. This journey is documented below in visual form (Figure 7) with a corresponding Google map (Figure 6).

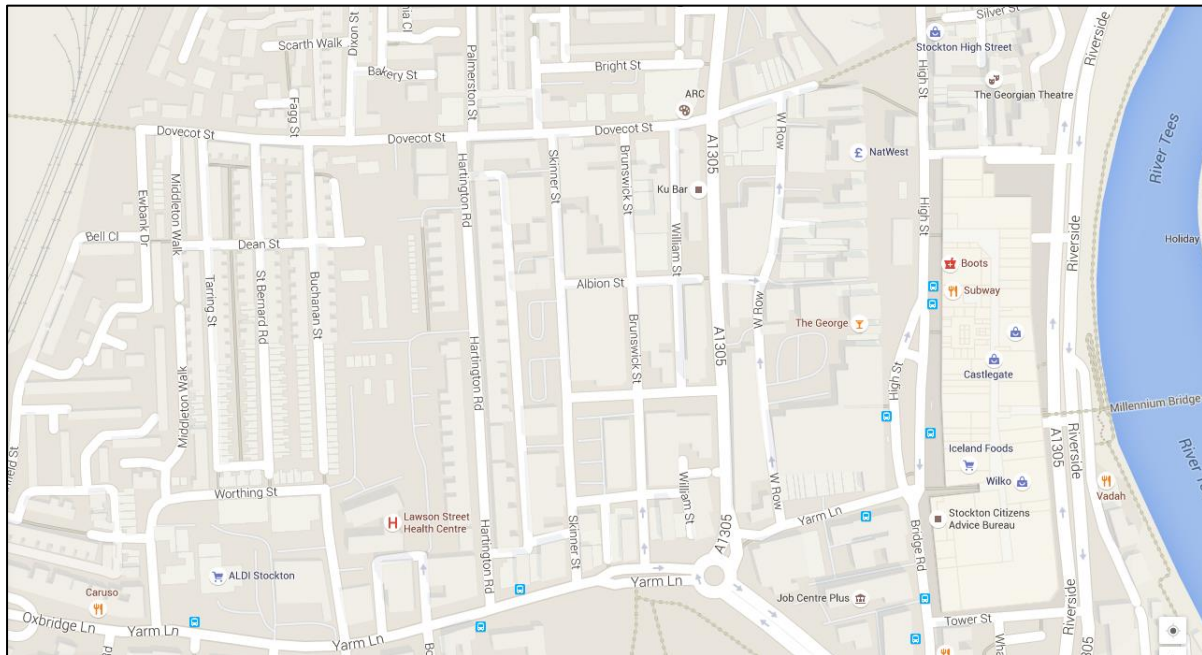


Figure 6. Image from Google maps showing corresponding area to that drawn in Figure 2.

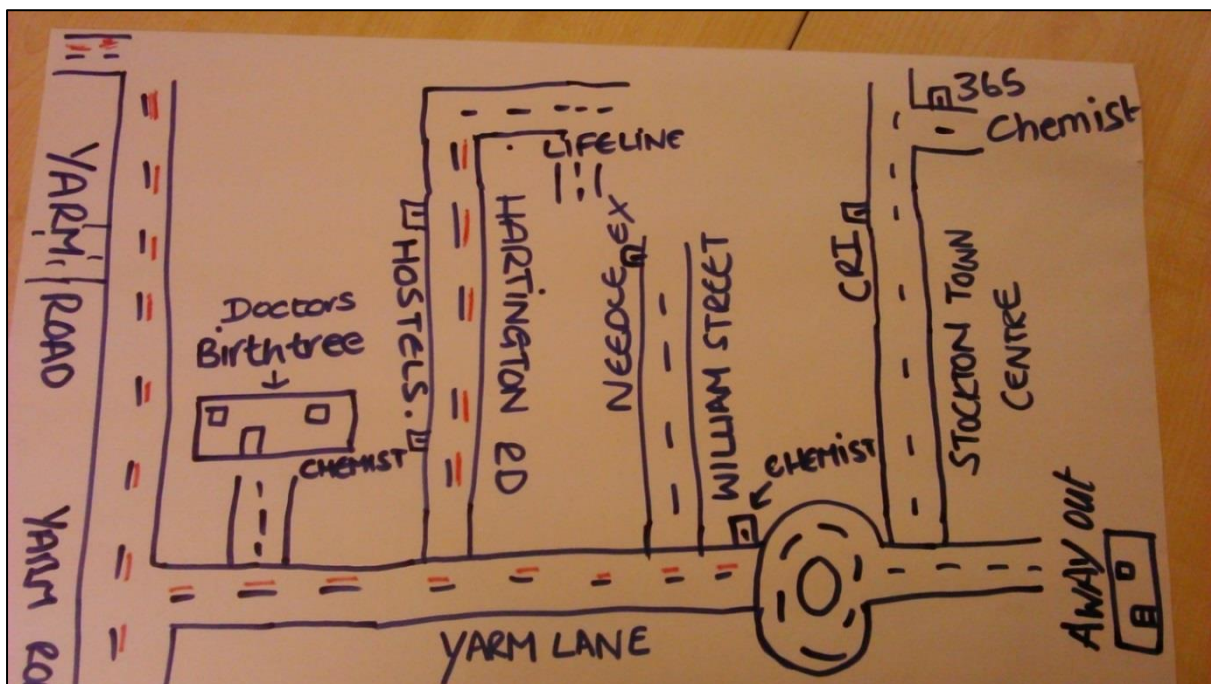


Figure 7. Mapping Stockton from A Way Out to Hartington Road, CRI on William Street and Lifeline on Skinner Street.



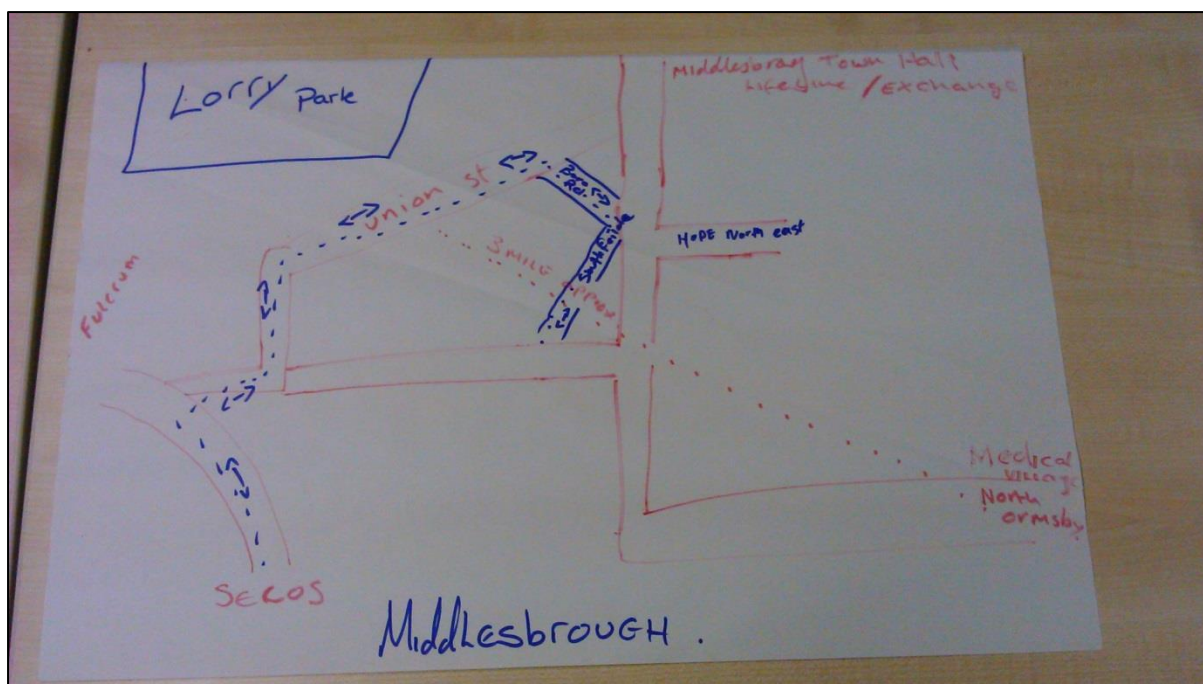


Figure 8. Mapping a route from Barnardo's SECOS

## Walking with Kath in Stockton



Figure 9. Leaving A Way Out



Figure 10. Leaving A Way Out we turned left and headed past Trinity Gardens towards Yarm Road “which is the start of the beat where the women work from”.



Figure 11. Chemist. “The main door is for most people, we use the side door”.





Figure 12. Looking down towards *Lifeline* CRI - Stockton Recovery Service is on the parallel street “we can get scripts there”.



Figure 13. One view of Birch Tree Practice. “To the left is where women go to get their scripts”.



Figure 14. Hartington Road/Yarm Lane. *"The hostel owners were asked by the police not to place women in Hartington road. I used to live down there".*



Figure 15. Side view of Birch Tree Practice.



Figure 16. Yarm Lane /Outreach parking. *“The van parks here, out of the way with a good view down Yarm Lane – AWO had to cover the sign so people don’t complain, the residents, about promoting and encouraging prostitution” (Kath).*

An outreach worker also said:

*“We brought the magnets that go on the side of the van as the girls said their partners didn’t like them coming over to the van, and they also didn’t want punters to see.”*

Walking with Kath we got a sense of the area being small, everyone knowing everyone, and in such a small area, being seen with researchers might be a problem. Kath began to get uneasy as we walked further along the route and seemed worried that she might be taken to be a ‘snitch.’

Along the walk Kath told us how she got to know about AWO and how she began selling sex. She had been a trainee manager at the food outlet and moved in with boyfriend. The relationship broke down and meanwhile her Mum had downsized and there was no possibility of moving back home. Kath tries to get support from housing and was told that because she has a job she has to pay for her bed and breakfast and will only get support when she is jobless. Meanwhile, her Mum gives her some space to stay until she gets

sorted. Kath then gives her job up in order to get support with accommodation and is placed in a hostel on Hartington Road.

Kath makes friends with a woman who is working selling sex and as Kath has no money, she sees this as a way of making some. Kath has sold sex for two years now and is currently exiting.

Kath's involvement in selling sex appears to be due to changes in the benefit rules and the circumstances surrounding her placement in hostel accommodation.

Kath has undertaken two counselling courses - Levels 1 and 2 (equivalent of 18 months' work). A Level 3 counselling course would be her next step.

## Section Three. Research Findings

### Findings from Peer Interviews with nine escorts

#### Profile of interviewees

Peer researchers interviewed nine women who currently work as escorts in the North East of England. The 9 women interviewed were aged from 22 to 44 years old at the time of interview and had started to work in escorting anywhere from age 18 to their late 30s. Most of the women interviewed had been working as an escort for the last 1 to 5 years (n=8); while 1 of the women described more than 20 years' experience of working as an escort.

3 of the women interviewed are originally from the North- East of England; 2 from elsewhere in the UK; 2 from outside of the UK; and 2 interviewees chose not to disclose this information.

4 of the women described their ethnic origin as White-British; 2 as dual heritage; 1 as White-Other and 2 didn't disclose their ethnic origin in the Peer interview.

7 of the women currently live in privately rented accommodation, while 2 were living in council/ local housing authority properties. 4 of the women had experienced brief periods of homelessness when in their teens/ early 20s.

The 9 women interviewed come from a range of educational backgrounds. 5 of the women did not initially finish formal secondary school education to GCSE level, although 1 of these returned to complete her GCSEs and A' Levels at a later date and 3 later attended college courses (including health and beauty; animal care studies and counselling courses). While 4 of the women interviewed have completed university degrees; 1 at postgraduate level.

3 of the women had been involved with children's social services at some point in their lives; 2 in their own childhoods/ as young people and 1 due and issues with child custody.

#### Family and Friends: secrets and stigma

6 of the women interviewed have children. Many of the women highlight that the need to support their children as a motivating factor in working as an escort.

*"As long as I can provide for my children and they aren't missing out on anything (I'm) happy to keep doing this. As long as they are happy I'm happy"* **Faye, age 30.**

Only 1 of the women interviewed currently has a partner. Some of the women described the difficulty of maintaining relationships while working as escorts. Katy described how it was too difficult to maintain a relationship alongside the job and said:

*"It's like leading a secret life"* **Katy, age 38.**

Many of the women describe keeping their work as an escort secret from their family and friends. Most of the women describe having few friends from within the sex industry and keeping their work a secret from their wider social networks/ friendship groups. Caro, who is in her early 20s, describes not wanting to make friends with other sex workers/ escorts for fear of being exposed as an escort. Similarly, Pam, age 22, says:

*"(I) keep myself to myself. Otherwise it causes complications and you don't know who you can trust"* **Pam, age 22**

Sam links the need to keep her work as an escort secret to the stigma of sex work:

*"It's the oldest profession and I think it's one the most honest profession but there's the stigma attached to it because some people don't know what it is or don't understand what it is."* **Sam, age 35-40**

Having to keep their work secret from friends and family can cause other difficulties. Faye describes how she is unable to financially help her family due to the need to keep her work as an escort secret:

*"(I) prefer it that way but it can be hard as I have to lie. If you have money you can't spend it. My Mam knows exactly how much I make (from her job other than escorting) and I have to hide the extra."* **Faye, age 30**

## **Routes into escorting**

The 9 women we interviewed described a range of reasons for initially working as an escort. Some of the women were financially motivated to start working as an escort due to issues with debt, or wanting to pay their way through University. Others saw escorting as a better economic option compared to other forms of work available to them and most reflected that working as an escort enabled them to earn good money, support their families and achieve economic independence. A number of the women are interested in getting on the property ladder and see the money earned from escorting as the quickest way to do this. Others see their escorting work as a way of earning enough money to set up other businesses or prepare to be financially stable in old age. While 1 of the women interviewed describes being motivated to work as an escort by her interest in sex.

## **Experiences of sex work**

### **Locations of work**

All 9 women describe working in various locations across the North-East of England. None of the 9 women currently work from their own homes and all expressed a desire to keep their working lives and home life separate.

*"Work is work and my home is home."* **Nina, age 44.**



*"You don't want to work where you sleep. You want to come home to your own home."* **Laura, age 22.**

The desire to keep working life and home life separate was often linked to the stigma of sex work and the need to keep their work as an escort secret from family and friends (as described above).

Many of the women described feeling more comfortable and safer working from agency flats (known as "in calls") rather than meeting clients in client's homes or in more public places such as hotels. Pam, age 22, and Nina, age 44 describe why they prefer to work from agency flats below:

*"You're sort of in control –rather than on out calls- it's your environment. It's a lot safer than being on the streets. It's really dangerous out there on the streets. And I choose to work like this because it's safe, it's controlled, it's comfortable I suppose when they are coming to me. I don't know who is coming through the door but I know my surroundings. I know everything around me."* **Pam, age 22**

*"I feel safe because they are coming into my environment. In the apartment, it's like my own for the day. I've got the confidence if someone gets out of line to put them back into their place."* **Nina, age 44**

Many of the other women made similar observations to Pam and Nina; that working from agency flats gives them a greater sense of security and they feel safer working in these environments.

Some of the women described going out to client's homes or meeting clients in hotels (known as "out calls"). In these scenarios, the women felt safer if they were able to contact a reputable escort agency before going in to an appointment and on coming out. This way they know that someone knows where they are and is looking out for their safety.

*"I know with the agency I text in and out and if I don't text out I get a phone call and I like that."* **Caro, early 20s.**

## **Feelings about escorting**

The 9 women we interviewed were mostly positive about their experiences as escorts. Most described feeling in control in their work and reflected that working as an escort had built their confidence and/or boosted their self-esteem.

*"Everyone thinks that you are victimised but in fact you are the one you has all of the control, have all the power because at any time you can say no that's it- get off me you're done, or no we're not doing that."* **Sam, aged 35-40.**

*"It's almost nice in a way. I get to meet lots of people and get lot of compliments (laughs). I leave feeling good."* **Laura age 22.**

*"I think I've achieved a lot in the last 3 years (since she started working as an escort) learned a lot, matured a lot. It sort of gives you a kick up the ass to grow."*

**Pam, age 22**

Many of the women described how working as an escort afforded them a quality of life they would not have been able to achieve otherwise. For example, Caro says:

*It is my choice, gives me independence, money, (I) can get on the property ladder, a car, can help family with the bills, and have the more luxury life afforded by money. I've been able to save to a certain extent...Before I worked in retail and couldn't have afforded the life I have now unless I had a rich partner- this work gives me independence.* **Caro, early 20s**

Other positives highlighted by the escorts we interviewed included the flexibility of the work: being able to choose working hours; the job fitting in around child care; and the job allowing a good work/life balance. One woman described feeling empowered by her work as an escort.

A few women described enjoying the intimacy of working as an escort and Pam described escorting as "her relationship":

*"It's a job. Went into it thinking I need money. (Now) I can't see myself doing anything else. It's something I've grown to...it's my relationship."* **Pam, age 22.**

However, some women described more negative experiences of working as an escort and having "bad days". For example, Sam describes a situation with a client where a condom came off, the client disgusted her and she thought the health risks of the job was not worth it. One woman described the way her work had reduced her levels of trust with men; she described a client leaving her to meet up with his girlfriend.

Many of the women expressed concern about the potential impact of the work on their sexual health and were also worried about the ramifications of being exposed to family and friends as having worked as an escort.

## **Experiences with clients**

All 9 women describe their male clients as coming from a range of age groups "18-80"; ethnicities and occupational backgrounds. There is no typical client described by any of the women interviewed. All 9 women describe having regular clients alongside new and one off clients.

Clients are described as looking for intimacy and conversation as often as they are seeking sexual encounters:

*"People assume they will be creepy men but some are really nice and some you never have sex with- they just want company."* **Sam, age 35-40.**

All of the 9 women describe being in control over condom use in sexual encounters with clients, although they do describe clients who will try to negotiate over the use of condoms.

*"If they won't use condoms. I just say no. It's my mouth, my body."* **Laura, age 22.**

*"They do try (to negotiate) but they don't get it if they won't wear one."* **Faye, age 30**

## **Experiences with Local Service providers**

### **Sexual Health Services**

All of the women interviewed described accessing sexual health services via sexual health clinics / GUM clinics / walk in health centres as the local service they most regularly access. While all 9 women were registered with a GP; none of the 9 women interviewed would be comfortable telling their GP about their sex work or approaching their GP about their sexual health. All 9 women expressed concerned about the impact of working as an escort on their sexual health and were keen to have regular sexual health checks.

*"I use condoms religiously but there's still always that risk, so I go get checked out and I would prefer to go every week for my own sanity"* **Faye, age 30**

However, Faye felt that she could not go as often as she liked to get sexual health checks because she cannot be open about her work as an escort with service providers:

*"When you go you forget what you've said (before) and because of the questions- it's hard. It would be nice to go in and be honest."* **Faye, age 30**

Similar to Faye, many of the other women we interviewed were uncomfortable with the questions asked by health service providers and many felt they were unable to tell health providers that they worked as escorts. Most of the women described feeling it necessary to make up stories in order to access sexual health services.

*"You've got to make up different stories every time. Because you can't get a proper full screening unless you have symptoms so you have to make things up"* **Jess, age 22**

This made it more difficult for the escorts to feel comfortable accessing services and most of the women felt the questions asked were intrusive and unnecessary.

*"I don't find it easy to attend. I find that I have to lie. I've got to make sure that I keep up with what I said last time. I do lie and I get anxious about the lying. I do go and get tested more than the average person would- to be safe and I feel a bit intimidated when they ask questions."* **Caro, early 20s**

*"I go in and ask for a swab- like a whole screening. They ask questions and I have to lie most of the time. They ask like how many people I've been with in the last 3 months".* **Polly, age 23**

*"(They) seem to ask questions that aren't relevant and not linked to your health. How many people have you slept with and in what length of time- they don't really need to know that."* **Pam, age 22**

Many of the women describe feeling judged by sexual health practitioners. Pam, age 22, was asked by a nurse she encountered regularly at a sexual health clinic why she slept with so many people and if she had been sexually abused as a child. While Jess, age 22, describes feeling judged by health practitioners when she disclosed she was a sex worker:

*"(I) Went to a walk in in Redcar and as soon as I said I was a sex worker- I got passed from pillar to post. They made it so complicated. I got told you need counselling. I got told you need help- you're not right"... It took 3 weeks for me just to get a full screening done because they would not drop it that I needed to go on these courses to clear my head and see what I was doing was wrong. And at first when I went in I didn't think I was doing anything wrong but after 2 weeks of someone telling you are doing something wrong you start to believe it."* **Jess, age 22.**

2 of the women described more positive experience with sexual health practitioners. Sam, age 35-40, described a positive experience when she disclosed her role as an escort to a health practitioner in Newcastle who works specifically with sex workers. Through the specialist practitioner, Sam found out about anti-viral drugs which can be taken with 72 hours if there is any potential exposure to HIV and was able to access an inoculation to protect against hepatitis. Sam describes this experience as "totally cool". Also, Laura describes a positive experience with a health practitioner:

*"I went in and I basically told them everything. And the lady I see she's really nice and when I left she just opened my bag and put in hundreds of condoms (laughs) and I said yes I'll have those."* **Laura, age 22.**

Many of the women expressed the need for a non-judgmental sexual health service which is designed specifically for sex workers, which they would feel comfortable accessing:

*"I would love it if there was a service specifically for working girls. It would be more confidential and more understanding from the medical professionals and we wouldn't be judged. We could be honest and being honesty with the job that we do. We just want to be safe."* **Caro, early 20s**

*"It would be good if there was somewhere where you could go and say who you were, and not feel like you're going to be judged." Nina, age 44*

## **Police**

See under safety and violence section below

## **Escort agencies**

Both positive and negative experiences of escort agencies are described by the women. Certain agencies will do safety checks, such as checking women in and out when on 'out calls.' These agencies have a positive reputation for women's safety and welfare. However, other agencies do not offer safe working practices. See under safety and violence section below.

## **Safety and Violence**

### **Experiences of Violence**

Overall, the 9 women we interviewed reported low experiences of violence in their work as escorts. Many hadn't encountered any violence in their work (n=5). However, some women described isolated incidences of violence from clients. Sam, age 35-40 describes a client hitting her and her hitting him back. Sam also describes feeling unsafe while on an 'out-call' and later finding out the client concerned had physically attacked other escorts previously. Pam, age 22, describes a client who pushed her physical boundaries during "rough sex". Laura, age 22, also describes encountering some aggressive clients.

### **Contacting the Police**

None of the 9 women interviewed have contacted the police in relation to a violent client and the majority stated they wouldn't feel comfortable approaching the police for help if they needed it.

*"I think it would just be just too much bother. The police take the piss all the time anyway." Laura, age 22*

Many of the women were concerned about being exposed as an escort and the impact that speaking to the police might have on keeping their sex work secret from family and friends:

*"I wouldn't go to the police. I would go to the agency because I have a family, I have children and they don't know that this is what I do." Faye, age 30*

While Polly, age 23, says she would contact the police but says:

*“Not sure if I would tell them I am an escort. I’d be embarrassed. I wouldn’t want to be questioned about my work”.* **Polly, age 23.**

Caro says she would be nervous about contacting the police because:

*“It’s such a secret world. I feel like I can’t go to the police. I would ring my friend, or ring the agency I’m working for, and ask them what to do to or ask for help because it’s so suppressed and demonised. It’s really bad because at a time when you need help you feel like you can’t ring somebody so then it’s like I’m dobbing myself in so where do I go for help?”* **Caro, early 20s**

## **Role of escort agencies**

Many of the women highlight the importance of working through an agency as a strategy for feeling and staying safe from violence. As described above, many of the women prefer to work from agency flats (“in calls”) rather than going to client’s home or hotels. Agency flats provide safety and a feeling of security for many of the women.

Most of the women say they would seek help from friends or the agency they work for rather seeking help from the police if they did encounter any violence.

However, some women also had negative experiences with some escorting agencies and not all escorting agencies are viewed as provided a safe environment. For example, Faye, age 30, described her experience with an agency where the male agent suggested he would be her first client.

## **Money**

### **Earnings from escorting**

For most women escorting is their main source of income. 2 women said that they had other jobs but did not want to disclose what their jobs were. All 9 women describe earning large sums of money from their work as an escort. However, they also describe the irregular nature of the work. Caro describes earning in a good week around £1000.

However, there are also difficulties with money that are related to the stigma of sex work that impacts upon what women do and how they perceive their income.

## Difficulties with money

- Some women describe difficulties in saving the money they earn from working as an escort as the money earned is cash in hand, is difficult to bank and it's difficult to pay tax on the money earned.
- Some describe not being able to share money with family due to stigma - (as above Faye in friends and family section).
- Some describe not being able to bank the money and so it doesn't get spent 'correctly' and that this would not be an issue without illegality, criminalisation and stigma.
- One woman described not banking her money.
- One woman described the precarious nature of sex work and the difficult choices women have to make to manage their earnings and the stigma associated with earning money from sex working.
- One woman talked about the tax system and wanting to pay taxes but because of the stigma associated with sex work, she feels she is open to possible blackmail by a third party. *"If you don't do this, I will tell, it makes you vulnerable, you are in a vulnerable position legally"*.
- Another wanted to develop property but because she felt unable to bank her money and she was doing this in what she describes as a precarious way that could risk losing everything.
- One woman told us about a friend who was the victim of a robbery, £3,000 was taken from her house and because she was an escort she felt she would not be taken seriously by the police.

*"The compounded restrictions make your life irregular cos you do not feel like a normal person, you are not recognised as a business women in you are unable to access normal things people access, you can't spend more than 3k in cash otherwise the money laundering act comes into play. SO MANY restrictions on having cash, you are forced into spending it so a lot of it gets wasted. Some women are generous with money and other people capitalise and so it does end up becoming a darker existence than it needs to be."*

All 9 women describe earning relatively large sums of money from their work as an escort.

## **Drug use and convictions relating to sex work**

None of the women interviewed stated any problems with drug addiction. None of the women stated that they had any convictions which related to their sex work. 1 woman had a minor conviction for handling (a boyfriend's) stolen goods and 1 woman had been in prison with an offence linked to drug dealing, related to her relationship with her abusive ex-partner.

## **Future aspirations**

Some of the women describe being happy to stay working as an escort and provide for their families. Others saw working as an escort as a temporary stage to save money to get onto the property ladder, return to education, set up a business or save money to provide for older age.

## **Recommendations arising from the escort interviews:**

- Introduce DLOs in Teesside to help build more positive relationships with the police and to maintain safer working practices.
- Reporting violence to the police needs to come with a guarantee of confidentiality.
- Support escort agencies that provide safe working practices for escorts. At the same time, do something about escort agencies whose working practices are exploitative.
- Non-judgemental health services are needed with specific and tailored health services for escorts/ sex workers.
- The 'Exit focus' of services prevents escorts, or puts escorts off, accessing health services.
- Information for escorts on legal ways to manage earnings.
- Information for escorts on where they stand with regards to the law.

Overall, due to the differences between off street and on street experiences of sex work it was suggested by off street sex workers that service providers need to consider how to provide service provision for different sectors of the sex industry with very different experiences and needs.



## Findings from Peer Interviews with on-street sex workers

### Profile of Interviewees

Peer researchers interviewed 17 women who either currently, or who had until relatively recently, worked selling sex on-street in the Teesside area.

The women ranged in age from 28-44 years old, although the majority (76%, n = 13) were aged between 30-35 years old.

All of the participants were White British.

4 of the women interviewed were aged under 18 when they started sex work; with 3 aged 16 and 1 participant aged only 13. The majority (n=13) were aged over 18. 6 participants started in their 20's and a further 3 were in their 30s; the oldest was 35 when she started working.

Most of the participants (82%, n = 14) had been working for over a year when they took part in the research, with 7 participants having worked for over 10 years. At least 5 participants used the phrase 'on and off' to indicate that their sex work was not continuous over this period of time.

In terms of their education and qualifications 7 participants (41%) had no qualifications and were interested in getting qualifications such as 'Maths and English' or expressed an interest in basic learning such as 'reading and writing' or 'being computer literate'.

8 participants had 1 or more GCSEs or NVQs Level 1 and 2 in subjects such as hairdressing, catering, or counselling. 1 participant had a first year diploma. Only 1 participant had high levels of educational attainment; possessing GCSEs, A' Levels and 3, university degrees.

### Housing and Homelessness

10 participants live in 'supported' housing, this being a mix of refuges, hostels, supported accommodation where they live by themselves, or shared supported accommodation with other women either on a shared room basis or shared building. 1 participant was in supported accommodation with her child. Of the other participants who are not currently in supported housing, 6 live in private rented accommodation and 1 lives in a council rented property.

Of these 17 participants, all but 1 had previously been homeless. Participants spoke about the 'horrible' experience they had being homeless, and the impact it had on them; particularly in terms of their emotional well-being and mental health:

*"It made me not care ... no confidence, no self-esteem, depression."* **June, age 44**

Being homeless and working on the streets was particularly problematic, participants would stay at a punters if possible and in general were in an extremely vulnerable position with

nowhere to go. Often the women would struggle during the day time, many describe just 'walking around' before they went to work on an evening:

*"It was just awful. It was winter. It was freezing and you walked around all day and then you've got to walk around all night working. It was just awful."* **Christie, age 31**

For some women being made homeless was a crucial turning point that contributed to them engaging in sex work as Kath explains:

*"I had to quit my job, housing benefit said they couldn't put me in a hostel if I was working and I was only working part time so I couldn't afford a flat on my own, so I quit my job. Where they put me was in the middle of people who were using drugs so I ended up having a worsen [sic] habit, I ended up working on the streets."* **Kath, age 29**

Support services, including A Way Out, are a crucial life-line for the women. Unlike Kath above who was not supported with her housing situation, for Rowena having a support worker at A Way Out meant that she was able to get help on the same day that she was about to be made homeless. The support worker was able to find her accommodation and help her at a time when she clearly needed support:

*"[being homeless] it was going to be like a big impact, I was almost suicidal but luckily my support worker from A Way Out was able to get me suitable housing on that day."* **Rowena, age 30**

When asked what they would do if they did not have a bed for the night the responses ranged from walking around, staying at a friend's house, staying at a punters' property, or paying for a hotel room for the night. No participants explicitly mentioned asking for help from any support services.

Only 1 participant (who had not directly experienced homelessness) said they would stay with family members.

## **Family and Friends: secrets, stigma, and broken-down relationships**

13 of the women interviewed mentioned having children; for 2 women these were now grown up and of those with younger children only 1 lived with her child. The circumstances of the other 10 women were more complicated: some had some contact with some of their children, but many did not expand further on this during their interview. 1 participant had initially said she did not have children, but later in the interview spoke about having a child, but the child had tragically died.

10 participants described themselves as in a relationship. For those in a relationship some partners knew about the sex work (these tended to be longer relationships where the

woman was working before meeting their partner) but others did not (these tended to be newer relationships of less than 6 months).

2 of the women who were in a relationship described how their partners were okay about their sex work sometimes, and not at other times, highlighting the instability that can feature across all aspects of the women's lives: "they change like the weather" (**Zoe, age 33**).

9 of the 17 participants had family (parents, grandparents or siblings) who lived close by but few indicated that they regularly saw their family. **Rowena, age 30**, described her family as being 'ashamed' of her sex work.

Domestic violence appeared to be a theme across current or previous relationships. This was not a direct question in the interview therefore the exact numbers are unknown, with only 1 woman explicitly using the term 'domestic violence' (after the researcher prompts):

**Researcher:** Have you ever been a victim of crime/what was the impact of this?

**Fran, age 40:** *"Well, basically it's only through my ex-boyfriend"*

**Researcher:** *"Domestic violence, yeah?"*

**Fran:** *"Yeah, I think it's had an impact sometimes when it's getting a bit rough I just go with the flow, I don't like conflict."*

There appeared to be a reluctance to discuss issues of domestic violence or to label it as such, however, the other women interviewed did volunteer some information in the course of other lines of questioning that suggested they had been victims of violence in the past; for example, when asked if they were a victim of crime, or if they had any involvement with social services:

*"I feel safe because I've been through violence so I know how to handle situations because I've lived them situations before. Which isn't a good experience, but it's an experience, so I know how to work with someone who's aggressive to make them none aggressive."* **Sally, age 35**

Other women described incidents that suggest exploitation, emotional abuse and coercion and control: for example, describing themselves as being 'sold' by their partners, often describing themselves as having very little say in the process:

*"[My boyfriend] like walked me down Yarm Road because we were going to sell the toaster but he ended up selling me to this bloke."* **Rowena, age 30**

## **Routes into Sex Work**

The women were influenced by peers, friends, and male partners into embarking on sex work as well as financial need.

Drug addiction and coercion by a partner in order to fund their joint alcohol and drug habits were also a common feature of routes in to selling sex:

*"With a lad, a boyfriend, who pushed me into it [aged 16 at the time]" Erin, age 32*

*"[My partner at the time] was an alcoholic and had a drug habit, he made me do it [aged 16] in order to fund his drug habit ... after I left him I went back to the streets to fund my own drug habit." Christie, age 31*

*"I got with a heroin addict boyfriend ... he was a lot older than me [I was 16] and everything else and I thought it was love." Rowena, age 30*

For other women they were influenced by the people around them at the time:

*"People I was knocking about with at the time, I was on drugs at that point as well so." Louise, age 37*

For other women it was more clearly linked to a lack of money in their situation in the moments leading up to selling sex.

*"It sounds daft but I was walking down Borough Road and I was approached for business, I was skint so I did it." Sian, age 28*

*"I had some compensation after a car crash, I got married and when the money went we let drug dealers start selling gear from our house, and then my ex-husband said to me 'look at the state of that [girl], you'd make a fortune – you're miles bonnier than her. So my ex-husband came out with me, and I made a fortune! So I just kept doing it coz I was addicted to the money." Kayla, age 33*

*"It was through a lass I'd met and she was doing it and she always seemed to have money so I thought it'd be quite easy, but years ago it was." Fran, age 40*

Benefit sanctions and a lack of other ways to make money (for example, police operations that clamped down on begging) were instrumental 'push factors' into selling sex for some women. With women describing working not to buy drugs but to pay bills, buy groceries and pay rent:

*"I ended up starting because I'd been put in a hostel and I had to quit my job, so because I quit my job I couldn't get any dole money. So the council told me to quit my job, but the dole wouldn't give me any money, so there was a girl working in my building so I worked with her, started going out with her to get money for food and things because I didn't know about the services or anything, like I didn't know about you [A Way Out]." Kath, age 29*

*"Since my benefits were sanctioned and police stopped me begging." Sally, age 35*

Two participants did not remember, or know (or want to discuss why), they began sex work “it just happened” **Zoe, age 33**.

## Experiences of Sex Work

In contrast with the experiences of off-street sex workers/escorts the women did not speak about sex work in a positive way, with many describing negative experiences (these are discussed in more detail in the ‘Safety and Violence’ section). Many talked about wanting to stop or trying to stop, and it can be seen from their ‘future aspirations’ that for most their hopes were around coming off drugs, having a secure home and another job.

## Locations of sex work

All 17 participants worked on the street, because it is the easiest/best place to get business. Participants described the looks and non-verbal signals that would be used:

*“Just through nodding at them on the street, if a single man went passed in his car”*  
**Rowena, age 30**

*“Just drive past and then I’m getting that look and then I nod my head and they drive back, or they won’t. Or they’ll laugh a few times and then they’ll stop.”* **Sally, age 35**

There was also a safety element to their choice of working on the street too: Sally, age 35, describes working on the street she can “see who is coming, people can see me if anything goes wrong”. There was also safety issues considered in relation to where they would not work, so streets, or alleyways, or places where there was no lighting.

All worked in Stockton/Middlesbrough: 9 women had only ever worked in Stockton, 1 woman had worked in both Middlesbrough and Stockton (moving home had led to the relocation). 1 had previously worked in London and another said she had worked in Darlington and Manchester, although this was through a client driving her from Stockton to these cities. In general none of the women travelled elsewhere to work in different cities.

5 participants worked in their own home as well; perhaps meeting a client on the street and then taking them back to their premises. They would be able to charge more money for doing this, although 1 participant thought that in her experience “clients don’t like to go inside – they feel like they are getting set up.” **Kayla, age 33**

However, for the other women working from home was preferable as “it’s much more safer for yourself”, both in terms of fear of attack and also the legality of it; “it’s legal if it’s in the premises as long as only one of you are working.” **Christie, age 31**.

Some of the participants had previously worked from other locations including hotels and in cars. There was however a reluctance to work from another person’s accommodation, as Sally describes “[I wouldn’t work] in somebody’s house, somebody else’s environment – you don’t know what will happen.” **Sally, age 35**

3 participants strongly stated that they would not work anywhere near schools or residential areas.

[I would not work] near kids or residential areas, *“out of respect for other people ... because it’s not nice having someone prostituting outside your house is it?”* **Kayla, age 33**

## **Mobile Phones, Web-sites and the impact on street sex markets**

In using technology 3 had used the internet, 7 used the phone (although this was often later described as giving regular clients their phone number). In general there was a reluctance to using websites due to a feeling of not being in control of where their images might end up, in particular that they might be seen by family or friends.

As June describes:

*“I wasn’t comfortable with online work, I just didn’t feel safe ... didn’t want to upload photos onto a website.”* **June, age 44**

For others, not having a phone or being able to afford to run a phone, or access the internet, or indeed having necessary computer skills to be able to use internet-based technology, meant they did not use online sites.

Maisie highlights how working from the internet is deemed safer, yet it is not an option – due to this lack of accommodation and/or access to the internet:

*“It’s better obviously, if you’ve got a house and that you can work from the internet – it’s much safer than working on the streets.”* **Maisie, age 31**

Kath described the changes that occurred as new technologies began to be used and the impact this had for many working women:

*“When internet sites [became popular] girls on street were not getting as many punters; because punters were going to houses rather than getting caught on the streets. It lowered the prices on the streets.”* **Kath, age 29**

Fran describes it becoming less safe to work on the streets because of the changes:

*“Yeah, I think there’s less punters drive about now, but I think it’s more dangerous as police they seem to be pushing punters away so you feel like you have to do it secretly, when they’re doing it secretly I think that’s where all the lasses are getting into trouble, yeah.”* **Fran, age 40**

Although not all women thought the internet and changes in technology were a bad thing, for Corrine, age 25, the internet *“made it easier – got more work”*. While there was a

general agreement that advertising online meant more money, there was some disagreement among the women as to whether it was safer or not;

*"I have advertised before – it is a lot safer and you make a lot more money"* **Sian, age 28**

*"People say it's safer but I don't see how it is because you're just getting the number, I don't see how it's safer, all it is on Adultwork is they go on the site look at your profile get your number and ring you. If they didn't say from Adultwork you wouldn't know if you gave your number to someone on the street, or they found you through that site...maybe because you don't have to go on the streets as much because you're getting people phoning you through the day so you don't have to go on the streets as much, I think that's the only benefit for me anyway."* **Kath, age 29**

## **Safety on-line and on street**

Being 'safer online' for Christie means that there will be a record, so offenders are more likely to be caught:

*"There's better money. It's safer because there's a paper trail if anything goes wrong – there's a paper trail for the police"* **Christie, age 31.**

## **Feelings about sex work**

Some participants had stopped working already, for many of the others it was seen as a source of income, sometimes to fund a drug habit but for many it was for everyday expenses:

*"Fund drug habit or just for money for gas, electric etc."* **Erin, age 32**

*"Main reason was drugs really, and money for food and stuff. Rent."* **Kath, age 29**

*"No [not for drug use] for everyday life: food, bills and stuff."* **Zoe, age 33**

*"I just do it if I need the money, I feel embarrassed and ashamed now"* **Kayla, age 33**

2 participants in particular stressed that it was not something they wanted to do, but they felt there were no other options available:

*"[I] just do it if I need to, I don't want to but sometimes I have to."* **Courtney, age 32**

*"[I have] no other options, [stopped begging by the police & benefits had been sanctioned] I haven't got family support."* **Sally, age 35**

Most participants had tried to stop in the past or had already stopped sex work (some responses were not recorded). For those that did stop, one of the main things helping them

to stop sex working was to move away from the area – 5 participants cited this as being one of the key things that helped them to stop.

Being known for selling sex in a small area, where punters regularly frequent is clearly an issue as the following 3 participants describe being ‘triggered’ or lured back in through the prospect of easy money: ‘[I] tried to stop loads of times but the money is too good’;

*“Sometimes I’d get phone calls off punters so that would trigger me off to go back working, or I’d relapse and end up having to go back out to work.”* **Kath, age 29**

*“I tried to stop a few times but its easy money, the money is there, I see punters driving about and they stop for me.”* **Erin, age 32**

*“[I stopped] for a little while and then something happens and it just draws me back, like someone will pull you over, just going to the shop ...you don’t have any intention of doing it but you know someone stops and it changes your mind.”* **Fran, age 40**

When asked how much longer they saw themselves working, the women who were still working, gave one of two responses – either they were not sure or ‘undecided’, or they thought it would not be for much longer.

Describing the main problems the women spoke about the danger they faced doing this work, particularly in relation to sexual violence and assault as well as problems receiving payment;

*“Oh God, well its life and death isn’t it? It is your life, you are facing death every day.”* **Louise, age 37**

*“Safety – you don’t know who you were coming across – you could have got murdered.”* **Corrine, age 25**

*“Scared of getting raped and battered, because I have been before.”* **Kayla, age 33**

*“Not knowing whether the next car you’re going to get in, you know if you’re actually going to get back out.”* **Fran, age 40**

**Betsy, age 31**, explains how despite facing these things she was still able to work as she just did not think about it at the time: *“when you’re there you don’t think about it, you just get the money but now looking back”*.

For others there was indignation at how little money they were sometimes offered in return for their services:

*“Being expected to provide a service for very low amounts of money or no money – being offered cigarettes or food rather than payment.”* **Rowena, age 30**



*"People not paying, not getting the price you want, people lowering the price."* **Kath, age 29**

2 participants described facing no problems, 1 as she was already so used to violence that it did not worry her anymore:

*"None, I've been through violence and all that and I can adapt to anything"* **Sally, age 35**

## **Experiences with Clients**

The general consensus from the women was that clients were 'all types': from 'young lads' aged 17 and 18 to older men aged up to 80. Some were married, and worked in a range of occupations:

*"Yeah, I've done business with professional footballers, judges, bank managers, bin men, bus drivers – you name it!"* **Zoe, age 33**

*"They range from 17 – 80, taxi drivers, ambulance drivers, firemen, magistrates..."* **Kayla, age 33**

Although it was noted that some clients tended to lie about their occupations. Rowena argued that they don't like to say their occupation as they think it will affect the price:

*"They lie about their occupations so you don't think they're on a high wage so you don't ask for too much money for whatever activity it is that they want to do with you."* **Rowena, age 30**

Kath sums up the breadth of clients she sees:

*"All ages, the young lads to something like 50-60 year old... They don't really tell you what they do. All occupations really, I've had people who worked in bars, I've had like young lads, drug dealers, people who have retired, who don't work anymore, people on the sick, mostly of people who own their own businesses like building businesses and stuff, like people like that, taxi drivers. Some are local, some travel. I know some of them have got wives and kids and what they used to do, or where they used to live, or the jobs like the jobs they do. Their health, they even tell you about that."* **Kath, age 29**

Some women expressed an attitude of not particularly caring about the background of clients

*"I'm not bothered about them, I don't ask."* **Louise, age 37**

However, those that do know the background of their regulars are very clear to define it in business terms.

## Good Clients

Good clients tend to be regulars: they are known to the sex worker and they are more likely to respect the worker and also respect the terms of the agreement: and pay the agreed amount.

*“Regular and good payer.” Maisie, age 31*

*“Pays decent and gives you money upfront.” Sian, age 28*

*“Pays you, pays you the proper amount like what you asked for, doesn’t talk [laughs] and is fast.” Kath, age 29*

*“Doesn’t give you no hassle, gives you the money when you ask for it and drops you back off I suppose.” Louise, age 37*

Additionally there were other personal preferences – 1 participant preferred someone who did not talk, another said a good client as someone who talked to you. However, a fast transaction was favoured by most: *“Normally like if they ejaculate quickly” Rowena, age 30.*

## Bad Clients

Unsurprisingly a bad client is the opposite – someone who is rough, violent, does not respect the worker and haggles over the price. Sally, describes a combination of factors:

*“The way they come across to you, the way they look at you, the way they talk to you, how the voice is when they’re speaking if its high tone, low tone, aggressive, non-aggressive all that. Body language is major like their mouths saying one thing their body’s saying I could rip your head off! Unless everything’s in tune, the way they speak, the way they look then I’m not there.” Sally, age 35*

*“Horrible and just think you are a piece of meat.” Maisie, age 31*

*“Can be rough.” Sian, age 28*

*“One who doesn’t pay you, if you got to negotiate the price and who wants extras, extras for free [Interviewer prompts for violence] Violence yeah, they won’t let you go and if you’ve just like you’ve had enough and you want to go and you just think they’re taking the mick and they won’t let you go.” Kath, age 29*

*“Make you do things you don’t want to do.” Erin, age 32*

*"Gives hassle, not very nice."* **Louise, age 37**

*"Hurt and treat you bad."* **Courtney, age 32**

*"Some force your head down when you're giving oral ... a few pull over and they're wanking themselves, and you get the lads coming around throwing eggs, some clients ask for sex for £5."* **Kayla, age 33**

*"A bad client, offer you cigarettes and food and that."* **Rowena, age 30**

*"They just think they can pay you £5 for everything."* **Maisie, age 31**

## **Regular Clients**

Most of the participants (all but 1) had regular clients and preferred them because they were 'safer', 'reliable', and saved them going out on the streets. However, as noted above participants were selective in the wording used towards regulars – most were described as being 'alright' but it is important to note the limits of the relationship:

*"A basic working relationship with them really, if I see them outside I wouldn't speak to them unless they speak to you."* **Fran, age 40**

If anything a few spoke of a friendship:

*"Good, we have a laugh, we go to McDonalds, he buys me fags and gives me £40. We get on like friends do you know what I mean, I don't class him as a punter."* **Kayla, age 33**

However, for the majority it was a 'business deal' – just an easier deal to make

*"Just coz like if they've been alright with you once, then they'd normally be alright with you again and say if you've got a £60 regular and its normally £60 every time and if you ring him and say I'm short, oh yeah I'll lend you a tenner or whatever and we'll just take it off next time."* **Rowena, age 30**

*"Yes because you, I can't say rely, I suppose that's not the right word but nine times out of ten they'll meet you."* **Louise, age 37**

*"It was alright but they all say to you 'oh we only come down to see you' and then you'd see them with someone else in the car the next week and you'd just think you must say it to all of them, that they'd only do business if you're around."* **Rowena, age 30**

There was one exception with regards to the use of regulars, Sally who is in a relationship and has set clear boundaries sex work and relationship:

*"Sometimes they'll sit and talk to me sometimes, [but] no but I'm not interested! At the end of the day that's a one-time thing and I make it very clear to them, if you see me don't talk to me, it's a one-off thing, if you want a girl again come back here, you'll probably find another one but don't focus on me. I didn't come out to make this an on-going agreement."* **Sally, age 35**

In addition to violence discussed later in this section the women also described strange and unpleasant requests from clients that included role play fantasies about rape and a client who asked for a younger girl:

*"He drove me up to [road name] and wanted to play a rape scene on me. I walked into the bushes and he did the business on me – carried out his fantasy."* **Sian, age 28**

*"An inappropriate one for me was when a bloke asked me to get someone of a younger age and I reported him to the police because I didn't think it was appropriate."* **Christie, age 31**

All participants except 3 said that they always used a condom for full sex, with many using it for 'everything' too. The 3 women who did not always use a condom made exceptions for regular clients in relation to full sex, or oral sex and often because they received a lot more money:

*"Regulars who I see, there are some that are alright, but obviously you can't be..."* **Kath, age 29**

*"One of the regulars used to come every week and give me loads more money, sounds bad doesn't it?"* **Betsy, age 31**

*"No, I have in the past, I got pregnant to a punter...well my regulars I will do oral without them, but I won't let them cum in my mouth, but I definitely won't have sex with them [without a condom]."* **Kayla, age 33**

Most said that yes there was 'always' negotiation around condom use to which most of the women describe being in control of the situation:

*"Yes but I make them wear them anyway"* **Maisie, age 31**

*"I say wear a condom, or we don't do business"* **Sian, age 28**

*"Yes loads – tough luck!"* **Erin, age 32**

*"They always ask, but I can't understand what man would want to sleep with a prostitute without wearing a Johnny"* **Fran, age 40**

## Experiences with Local Service Providers

11 participants described feeling judged by service providers, the majority of which referred to the police and social services as the main agencies that made them feel this way although other services were highlighted too.

**Erin, age 32**, felt they were judged by GP *'most definite'* and the chemist *'look at me like crap'*.

**June, age 44**, also described feeling judged by nurses at the hospital, describing on particular nurse who made her wait until last for her medication.

**Zoe, age 33**, also felt judged: *"Just always are, in general: hospitals, police, social services - anywhere they find out I'm on methadone probably. They treat you like scum, disgusting, horrible. Just horrible."*

## Sexual Health Services

Most participants did go for full sexual health check-ups, although these were not always frequent. Some had failed to have them in the past but had started to get checked now. 1 participant admitted to not getting tested at all. For the others there was a range of answers in terms of the frequency of checks – some participants were checked every month or every two or three months, others every six months.

*"I know it's supposed to be every three months but it depends if I feel like I've got a problem or not."* **Fran, age 40**

1 woman used to have hepatitis C and so has extra checks, she was happy with the service:

*"No I think they're alright, they're fairly okay; even when I've had abortions in the past at the hospital they've been canny – they haven't been biased or anything."*  
**Kayla, age 33**

Many were happy with the service from A Way Out where they could access condoms with relative ease. Other things like special chlamydia testing kits/events were praised, as were the sexual health check-up clinics in Billingham, that were open on an evening making it easier to access.

This is especially important as many of the women struggled to make appointments, depending on how they were feeling. Fran explained how she lacked the energy, motivation or will to attend appointments:

*"Well, I'm always depressed, and I don't have no energy to get up and do it and I don't want to think of my actions, or what has happened, until it's too late then I think what's the point – it's all gonna turn out shit anyway, I might as well make it shit."* **Fran, age 40**

The service/organisation the appointment is with is also a factor.

Some had unsatisfactory experiences when going for sexual health checks:

*"[I feel] stupid you have to sit on one side for testing – it's so identifiable. I feel like I'm being judged". Irena, age 32*

However, most described the procedure itself being uncomfortable but the service itself was fine

*"They are sound, really nice people." Courtney, age 32*

*"No fairly ok, they have been supportive and concerned – not judgemental." Rowena, age 30*

## Police

Most had contact with the police in relation to their work and responses were mixed.

There were some negative comments about the response of police officers in situations where women felt unsupported.

Important to note that, in addition to the officers from the 'vice' team and the DLO who take a 'welfare based' approach, women will also have contact with routine patrol officers.

*"I felt judged, mainly when it comes to working. If you report a punter or something on the street they look straight through you, they are just not bothered."*

**Louise, age 37**

*"Police just made me feel worthless." Kath, age 29*

*"Police could be more supportive of working girls, they made me feel low and degraded. A bloke picked me up, would not pay me and tried to rape me. I got dumped in the middle of nowhere. The police would not help – they said 'we're not a taxi service'." Sian, age 28*

Working with other organisations in order to report an incident appeared to make a difference as the following example highlights:

*"I thought they weren't going to believe me but SECOS helped me through it. Some [police are] ok, some judge coz of prostitution." Fran, age 40: [attacked by punter]*

Rowena describes her past experience with the police following being raped by a client, this experience meant that two subsequent rapes went unreported:

*I've been raped three times by clients, in the past because [the first time] I was raped, I contacted the police who took me to that place past Middlesbrough police station*

*[SARC], did all the DNA gathering and as soon as they found out I was a working girl the police actually said the jury will laugh at you and the judge will tear you apart if this goes to court. Which made me obviously not pursue the charges. Because it is its just ridiculous, they just treat you like you're scum the police ... because of the lack of support I got and I was belittled and made to feel stupid so I didn't report the other two.* **Rowena, age 30**

For Maisie because she had been criminalised for sex work and was under an ASBO she felt unable to contact the police for fear she would be arrested:

*"I daren't tell the police because of my ASBO, I'm scared I'll get arrested."* **Maisie, age 31** *[Because she was under an ASBO]*

There was one positive experience noted by Kath where the police helped her when a client refused to pay:

*"I did a service for someone and he wouldn't pay me so I phoned the police and they took me home and then they took the man round all his friends and family to get me the money and they made him get out of the van and walk over and give me the money because he admitted to it. So it was a bit, they were nice in that one."* **Kath, age 29**

Whilst some women did not feel comfortable contacting the police in relation to issues on the street/through their sex work they said that they would contact the police in an emergency or if someone else was in trouble.

*"I'd rather do it through an agency but I would do it if it was an emergency or a major thing that happened."* **Fran, age 40**

In an ideal world the women wanted a police response to sex work that made their job safer. Specifically they wanted to be protected instead of targeted and they want to be listened to:

*"The police to look after us and not lock us up"* **Irena, age 32**

*"Yeah I think it would work if there were a few female officers that were there just for the girls. I mean years ago there used to be officers going around and checking on, they were just there for the girls but I don't think you get that anymore. I think they're just more bothered that you're working – well that you're not working ... I think if they sat and spoke to the lasses, then I think they'd understand but they don't. They look at us like you're working girls and that's it, they don't look as if you're individuals."* **Louise, age 37**

It is important to note that in Stockton the DLO role is now established and a 'welfare based approach' is followed. This is documented in the stakeholder section of this report.

## Social Services

4 women had no contact with social services. The 13 women who had contact with social services experienced this as negative.

There were two clear themes in relation to the contact the women described with social services: those who had been in contact with social services when they were children themselves; or when they had children. 2 participants were involved with social services both when they were a child and then when their children were born.

For those who were involved with social services as a child for some it was *“from being born, I suppose from day one”* (**Louise, age 37**), for others it was later at age 6 or 7 due to parental neglect, for **Courtney, age 32**, it was in her early teens when she was put into care for offending behaviour but described growing up in a house with horrible domestic violence.

Rowena was referred by her parents:

*“My parents referred me to social services when I was 15 basically for just being a rebellious teenager and running away from home, not because I had problems at home – just because I wanted to take loads of ecstasy tablets and be wrecked all the time.”* **Rowena, age 30**

The other participants were aged 16 – 25 when they had contact with social services and this was when their children were born, for Kath (age 29) when she was aged 16 she ‘got pregnant’ by an older man (who was aged 21 at the time). Social services involvement was to check she was not a victim of child sexual exploitation.

2 described social workers as already knowing about their sex work. **Kayla, age 33**, described *“loads”* of involvement with social services, she had post-natal depression after her son and could not look after him. In her case she describes the social workers not asking about her sex work, although she was working at the time, as they were more focused on her drug use.

Fran, described how she felt let down by the lack of support she received from social services: they were *“Not very helpful ... no, no support given, nothing”*. For her she felt abandoned, as she did not conform to stereotypical norms of a mother:

*“Basically they might as well have said to me – you want to keep your son? Just be a proper mother, and like a proper mother is like old school – they just expected you to wash away all your problems.”* **Fran, age 40**



## Safety and Violence

### Experiences of violence

Overall, most (n=10) of the participants had experienced high levels of violence including rape, assault and robbery. For those 10 women that had experienced violence it was not an isolated incident. For 3 women it had occurred so many times they had 'lost count'. Verbal abuse was also reported as an everyday experience for some. The following quotes describe some of the violent experiences of the women interviewed:

*"I've lost count, well I got like a few beatings and knifepoint robbery and rape – I've lost count it's been so many times."* **Louise, age 37**

*"About 10-15 times – always get verbal abuse. Been punched, punched in the head, grabbed and robbed. Didn't report it – didn't see the point."* **Kath, age 29**

*"I think twice, like he hit me and tried to take my money off me but he didn't get it. Both were violent attacks, both by punters. Did not report it but I told A Way Out, so other girls would know – he did it to a few other girls too."* **Maisie, age 31**

*"Three times – assault, rape and verbal abuse. I reported the assaults and the rape to the police and felt judged. Verbal abuse was from passers-by."* **Sian, age 28**

*"Yes a couple of times, a bit of both – verbal and physical assault. By punters. I reported it to SECOS at the time and they reported it to the police and I think the guy did get locked up."* **Fran, age 40**

However, 7 of the women reported not experiencing any violence in their work.

Generally the women tried to minimise the amount of risk they faced, both by employing strategies such as telling friends where they are, listening to their 'gut instinct' or looking confident when working, being aware of where CCTV cameras are, having a phone with them, or carrying a weapon:

*"I feel safe, own confidence, I've always worked safe – a friend has known where I was."* **Corrine, age 25**

*"I feel safe knowing there are cameras on the street ... [in relation to precautions] I've carried blades in my sock, took needles out with me in my bag, always have phone with me to dial 999 ... I have an alarm, like a rape alarm."* **Kath, age 29**

*"Get the money first, trust my gut instinct."* **Sally, age 35**

*"Go somewhere where people can hear me scream, or a friend's house where someone is there to help."* **Kayla, age 33**

Although one woman stressed that nothing would make it completely safe and pointed to the dangers of carrying weapons that could be used against you:

*"Nothing really, I would never feel 100% safe – even if you've got pepper spray you've got to get your hand into your bag – so whatever you take there it could be used on you."* **Fran, age 40**

## **Feeling Safe and Unsafe**

The theme of feeling both safe and unsafe came up frequently and it was clear that safety was not guaranteed and situations had the potential to change from safe to unsafe at any given time. Often when women were working they did not think about the risk and dangers.

*"I didn't feel safe or unsafe but I suppose I just didn't think about it ... I think there have been a few times where I've got in the car and they've started going their own way and I've thought 'God, where are they taking me?' so I suppose I felt a bit unsafe then because it would usually be me telling them where to go."* **Betsy, age 31**

*"It depends on your frame of mind and who you're with."* **Fran, age 40**

*"Bit of both, safe if I'm local and it's a regular, but unsafe if I travel far."* **Sian, age 28**

*"Sometimes both – I feel safe otherwise I would go mental!"* **Erin, age 32**

*"Feel unsafe... Just like all the dodgy punters about and everything like that."* **Rowena, age 30**

In general the women wanted sex work to be 'legalised' in order for their work to be made safer:

*"If there was a place I could go and it was monitored ... like a certain area to work in and more police checks in the area to check the girls are alright."* **Kath, age 29**

*"I think legalise it. I think that everyone should be checked so there wouldn't be all the STIs, they'd all have sexual health cards. Then the girls would have somewhere safe to work"* **Christie, age 31**

## **Addressing Violence against sex workers**

### **The role of the Police**

Women stressed the need to be believed, that offences against them should be taken seriously and that an increase in prosecutions would help send a strong message that the police were taking crimes against them seriously. Some said the way they were treated put them off reporting.

*"If I knew that something would happen to him."* **Maisie, age 31**

*“More prosecutions: if they took it a bit more seriously because as soon as you say to the police that you’re a working girl and it was a punter they don’t, they won’t, even look into it, they just like.... And that works both ways as well, like if I’d been attacked or raped off a punter, or if a girl attacks or robs them, either way the police just won’t touch it, don’t want to get involved.”* **Kath, age 29**

*“For them to work with us, engage with us.”* **Erin, age 32**

## **Role of support agencies**

Support agencies play a vital role. Some of the women, whilst not reporting an attack to the police, would tell A Way Out, or the Specialist ISVA who would then report it to NUM “so other girls would know”. This sharing of information through an agency is imperative as many of the clients who were violent had exhibited this behaviour to other women too.

*“[Support services] make sure I’m safe, they give me advice on dodgy punters.”* **Kayla, age 33**

Being able to report a crime to the police with the support of an agency was also important to the women, with many experiencing a more successful outcome, or being more satisfied with the process than if they report a crime by themselves.

This help and support from services covers all aspects of helping women work more safely or support their exit from sex work if they choose. A Way Out and SECOS Barnardo’s were singled out for the way in which they offered personal support:

*“And at A Way Out there’s help daily like coming on my period and I need some pads, when I want to work to get condoms, because otherwise I’d have had loads of babies without the condoms.”* **Rowena, age 30**

*“If I didn’t have A Way Out I wouldn’t know where to go”* **Erin, age 32**

Christie described the support she received from Barnardo’s, the practical support, even what may seem small, was really important in helping her to trust the service, build a relationship that helped her to regain her confidence:

*“Barnardo’s is a really good place to get support. I’d still be sex working and on drugs if it wasn’t for the kind people there that helped me get back my confidence. Well I was in hospital and they came up to see me and they got the TV put on for me so I wasn’t bored and they brought me magazines up. Brought me coffee and food and they were really nice, and while I was there they gave me a little bit of confidence to be on my own and gave me the confidence to stop working and using drugs.”* **Christie, age 31**

## Money

### Earnings from sex work

For all on-street sex workers this [alongside their benefits, if they were entitled] was their only source of income. 4 participants did not want to answer the questions in relation to their earnings. Of the other 13 women said that the least charged was £5 - £10 and the most charged between £50 and £300 with 1 woman earning a higher amount, through Internet based sex work, not on-street work.

### Drug use

The majority took or had taken drugs daily, often several times a day (n=9). 3 women described using drugs a few times a week, 2 said 'not often' or 'now and then' and 1 woman did not answer. The drugs used were mostly crack cocaine, and heroin (12 participants mentioned crack cocaine and 6 heroin. Other drugs some women used included cannabis, amphetamines, methadone, benzos, mephedrone (mkat) and powdered cocaine.

13 women had been using for a long period of time – over 14 years, often starting when they were very young. 6 participants began using drugs below the age of 16, and 2 of these were only 12 when they started using drugs. The main reason for using drugs was to 'block things out', this term was used by 4 participants and others talked about 'tragic events', including the death of their children and things in their past that had impacted on them.

*"Block things out."* **Kayla, age 33**

*"Just to block out a lot of past issues really."* **Christie, age 31**

*"Well a bit of everything, I lost my little girl, she died and everything went to pot after that."* **Louise, age 37**

*"Losing all my children (death and custody), rape, abuse, I've nearly been killed three times, I've had a shotgun in my mouth"* **Sally, age 35**

2 participants gave their reasons for using drugs as boredom, or because everyone else was doing it:

*"Boredom and where I lived being in the centre of the drug capital really."* **Rowena, age 30**

*"Not really, just because everyone else is."* **Fran, age 40:**

14 of the women described gaps in their drug use, 2 did not answer the question, and only 1 woman described used drugs continuously. 5 participants had gaps in their drug use due to a prison sentence. 2 were linked to children – 1 was pregnant, the other was trying to win custody of their child.

All but 1 woman had been, or were still accessing, drug treatment. Some were currently not using drugs but for many it was too difficult to stop. The 1 woman who was not accessing drug treatment had been using drugs for the least amount of time (approximately 4 years, whereas the other women described using drugs for at least 10 years and more). The vast majority described drug use as a problem:

*"Yes, every day I have to tell myself not to use."* **June, age 44**

*"Yes because they're there, too easy to get a hold of these days."* **Fran, age 40**

*"It adds to more problems, it's a vicious circle."* **Sally, age 35**

*"It's hard to come off them when they are just around the corner from you."* **Louise, age 37**

*"Because once I have a go at crack I want another and another and that's when I end up going out [to work]."* **Maisie, age 31**

Some women described the impact of drug use as devastating and had impacted every area of their lives including relations with family and friend, health and mental health issues, loss of jobs and housing; and that their sex work and drug use were linked.

*"It's made me have fits, lose my family and kids, I don't care anymore if I live or not."* **Kayla, age 33**

*"Massive – lost family, bad health, lost home, relationships."* **June, age 44**

*"I lost my family, work, I've been in prison, and people change their opinions of me."* **Erin, age 32**

Some women felt able to tell their drug worker that they were selling sex but some could not.

Male drug workers were problematic for some women in this regard, although often it just depended on the individual and the rapport they had with them.

Sometimes the women would see different drug workers and therefore it was difficult to share information with new people, or they had had a bad experience in the past where the drug worker was judgemental, following the women's disclosure about sex work.

*"I always have different workers, and males – so would not talk to a male about sex working. A male worker has made fun of me in front of other staff and my boyfriend about working."* **Sian, age 28**

Suggestions by the women to improve the drug services include more female drug workers and having the same drugs worker each time would also be beneficial. Many women did not want to have to talk about their sex work:

*“Going through my history all the time [puts me off] – seems pointless.” Irena, age 32*

There was also a feeling by some women that drug workers did not have enough knowledge in relation to their work and that this is a missed opportunity for brief interventions when women are accessing drug treatment. They feel like they just go in and collect a prescription and leave, yet this is an ideal opportunity to offer more support and other healthcare services. Particularly as many of the women express difficulties in seeing their GP due to the nature of the appointment system. For women with difficult lives having to ring a doctor’s surgery at 8am is difficult and so they are not always able to access healthcare.

*“More understanding and knowledge, some places you go and it’s just like a textbook, they just don’t know.” Louise, age 37*

*“They could actually ask how I’m doing, they just give me a script and off you go – they have no time for me.” Erin, age 32*

## **Convictions relating to sex work**

15 women said they had criminal convictions. 10 received their first conviction in their teens. The youngest age being 11, the oldest was 25. The majority of the women’s convictions were for acquisitive crime: shoplifting, theft, burglary, robbery, fraud and deception. Some were for ‘violence’ (2 participants mentioned actual bodily harm, another stated grievous bodily harm), criminal damage, affray, drug offences, obstructing a police officer and soliciting and prostitution.

1 had an ASBO for working and *“that’s why I think the police in Middlesbrough used to target me, one of the conditions was to not sit on my own doorstep!”*

All except 1 of the women said they understood the law in relation to sex work.

*“Not at first, but I soon realised – I actually got arrested for it but I just got a caution.” Betsy, age 31*

Sally, age 35, was the only participant who was unsure about the law in relation to sex work *“not really, no”*. Erin wanted a bit more specific information, particularly in relation to paying fines made available.

*“I kind of understand the law but would like a little bit more information, like I didn’t know you could get ESO instead of being fined, I’m still having to pay fines from years ago.” Erin, age 32*

## **Future Aspirations**

The women expressed a range of aspirations from immediate goals such *“trying to get another day clean”* others were more specific relating to staying off drug, not working on the streets but in gaining another form of work and accommodation.

*"Yes to stay off drugs and to stop working altogether, to get a house and a job."* **Maisie, age 31**

*"Yes, get clean off methadone which won't be long. Look for a job."* **Betsy, age 31**

*"Yes I'm moving on from supported accommodation, get a job, get my driver's license"* **June, age 44**

Some of the women expressed a desire to go back to college to get qualifications:

*"To go back to college and do my level 3"* **Sian, age 28**

*"I'm currently working on staying off the streets, keeping clean from drugs and hopefully I'll be able to go back to college to help people who are in the same position as me [peer support]."* **Christie, age 31**

*"Working to stay off drugs and get into college, to do course, stop working."* **Kayla, age 33**

Corrine had a very specific goal in relation to her children:

*"Working towards getting my son off child protection"* **Corrine, age 25**

When asked what they might be doing in two years some were unsure, or did not know and for others having their 'own' flat or house or 'home'. 3 women envisaged a home where their children would be able to stay in their full time care or for visits. They hoped they would be clean from drugs and not working.

*"Two years, oh [long sigh] hopefully in a different place, be near my mam so I can go around my mam's everyday like i used to when I was not working, and when I'm not working I don't do the drugs."* **Fran, age 40**

For the others again the security of accommodation was mentioned with many wanting their 'own' flat or house or 'home'. 3 women envisaged a home where their children would be able to stay in their full time care or for visits. They hoped they would be clean from drugs and not working.

*"Hopefully in my own flat, with my son coming round to stay and with a little job or something."* **Maisie, age 31**

*"Hopefully in my own home, drug free and not working."* **Kath, age 29**

*"In a house with my son in my full time care."* **Rowena, age 30**

*"Hopefully with a nice home and me and my ex-partner sharing the kids."* **Kayla, age 33**

*“Hopefully with a good job settled down in a new home and still clean and not working and helping other people.” Christie, age 31*

## **Recommendations arising from on-street sex worker interviews**

Recommendations from street sex workers focused on developing positive relationships with the police, the need to address safety and violence, more support around housing, support on release from prison and importantly non-judgemental treatment services, not being judged and treated differently because they sell sex on street and use drugs.

- Positive relationships with police, to link more with organisations such as A Way Out and listen more to the needs of sex workers and to consider impact of some of their policies i.e. begging crackdown, ASBOs for sex work.
- More support – particularly around housing, benefit sanctions and literacy, numeracy and computer skills.
- Housing support needs are a priority especially in relation to supported accommodation and feel vulnerable in relation to private landlords. The area they live in has biggest impact, moving away is expressed, by some, is the only way to get clean/break from sex work.
- Support from social services.
- Support on release prison.
- Non-judgemental support from key support agencies, Arch ISVA, A Way Out and Barnardo’s SECOS (for younger women) is imperative.
- Training for services to better understand and engage with sex workers. For example, training and support so that staff might ask appropriate questions of sex workers - in order to get the best outcomes all round.



## Findings from Peer Interviews with stakeholders

21 stakeholder interviews were undertaken with representatives from statutory and voluntary sector organisations. The stakeholders include public health, sexual health, criminal justice agencies (including the police and courts) as well as charities and community organisations.

The interviews focused upon gathering information across three main areas:

1. What the organisation provides to sex workers/sex worker support organisation, their knowledge/experience of the client group and key issues emerging from their work.
2. Knowledge and information about local and regional sex markets.
3. Policies, practice and training –including policies that might be shared as well as experience around training.

This section summarises the key findings from the analysis of stakeholder interviews.

## What do the participating agencies provide to sex workers in Teesside?

Most of the agencies (such as a GP surgery, housing providers, and public health organisations) provide services to sex workers indirectly, alongside the support they give to all clients; or through the support they give to A Way Out and Barnardo's SECOS. A smaller number provide directly targeted services.

All of the participants described only working (whether directly or indirectly) with women selling sex, not men.

*“We don’t see males working.”*

*“Not engaged with anyone from trans community.”*

*“No contact with male or trans workers.”*

The majority of the agencies (n=17) described their approach as multi-agency.

## Agencies working directly with women

Agencies working directly with women provide services targeted at the specific needs of sex workers and these are: A Way Out, Barnardo’s SECOS, Arch sexual abuse counselling and advocacy service specifically through the *Specialist ISVA role*, as well as the Cleveland Police Vice Unit and recently appointed Designated Liaison Officer role (DLO).

The section below summarises what each of these organisations provide to sex workers, their knowledge/experience of the client group and any key issues they highlight.

## Arch North East

*It is our mission to help people affected by sexual violence to improve their quality of life. We do this by providing expert, quality support to women, men and children over the age of 14 years who have been affected by rape or sexual abuse.*

ARCH provided a range of support options, including a Rape/Sexual Violence Counselling Service. There are 4 counsellors, 8 volunteer counsellors and 5 female ISVA's as well as one of the country's first voluntary sector male ISVAs. They also support provide practical and emotional support through our Life Enhancement Skills Advisor role.

Through the ARCH Way project, ARCH offers a way for sex workers to disclose directly and receive the support they need. The project provides choices around the reporting of sexual violence and encourages the women to seek the specialist support that will help them to facilitate long-term recovery from their experiences. The women are supported through the entire process including the legal and criminal justice process, by a trained ISVA.

The organisation employs two dedicated ISVAs for sex workers informed by a good practice model for improving victim support and criminal justice outcomes for sex workers developed in other areas of the UK (Blair 2011; Campbell 2016, 2014). The ISVAs work in the Cleveland and Newcastle/North Tyneside.

The Cleveland ISVA is currently working with an active caseload and has seen a change in thinking occurring over the last 12 months, in that there is less under reporting of sexual violence and an increase in national ugly mugs (NUM) reports/membership.

The key issues for ISVA lead at Arch, who has a long history of working with sex workers in an outreach capacity are:

- Under reporting is an issue connected to women feeling that they will not be believed as well as because of their 'criminalised' and 'stigmatised' status.
- Safety on line – they are “*more at risk i.e., more hidden –unless agency work is used.*”<sup>19</sup> Arch does some net reach with on line sex workers and works with SAAFE support and advocacy advice for escorts.
- The future development of services to address sexual violence against sex workers, including the need for developing the DLO role and working together with the North East Sex Work forum and police forces to develop a regional strategy.

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<sup>19</sup> However, as reported in the off street interviews section agency work is a mixed bag as some agency owners are responsible and care for the health and safety of the women who work for the agency, but some do not.

## A Way Out (AWO)

A Way Out is an outreach and prevention charity which aims to engage, empower and equip vulnerable and excluded women, families and young people to live lives free from harm, abuse and exploitation and to reduce life limiting choices and behaviour. (<http://www.awayout.co.uk>)

A Way Out works across four projects areas, with families, youth, young women and women selling sex. The Liberty Project provides an outreach, engagement and recovery service to sexually exploited women involved in opportunistic and survival sex work. This group is part of a nocturnal economy which makes them hidden and hard to reach. Our holistic person centred approach aims to reach, engage and empower them as part of a focused recovery journey addressing their immediate needs for safety and inclusion. Over time we support and enable them to exit and break free from exploitative situations, addiction and sex working.

*“Our aim is to support and empower women to believe they can change, they can step away from survival sex work and take control of their lives. We strive to help the women to realise their true potential and we value and work with them to address entrenched behaviours, appreciating this may take a number of years to achieve”* (CEO, AWO).

The Liberty team consists of a full-time Team Leader, two full-time Complex Needs Support workers and a full-time Project Support Worker, along with a cohort of dedicated volunteers who take part in our programme activities, drop-in and outreach services. Our volunteers are essential and key to the delivery and production of services within the Liberty project. The skills, expertise and commitment they bring are invaluable and make a huge difference to the women we work with.

The project has a caseload of 45 women, with an average age of 28. We deliver a twice weekly, evening outreach service, taking the service to where the women are stood. We offer a drop-in service once a week for vulnerable women across Stockton and a weekly bespoke drop-in for sex workers. Additionally, the service offers a range of programmes and activities to help improve wellbeing, safety, self-esteem and recovery. Therapeutic programmes and counselling sessions are available, along with harm min, needle exchange, one-to-one intensive support and practical help, in the form of food, clothing and safety alerts.

*“Our service empowers and enables women to change their lives, supporting them until they are ready for change and helping them to find a way out of life limiting behaviours and choices. We stay the journey with women no matter what. For example, one of our caseworkers worked with a woman over a long period of time who progressed really well, then unfortunately relapsed into both drug addiction and sex work. The caseworker involved understood and was committed to being with her*

*on a long-term basis, building on previous progress and instilling hope for a future of freedom. We do NOT operate a '3 strikes and you are out' approach, as this would be wholly inappropriate for our clients. We offer a flexible, supportive approach to women with complex needs.” (CEO, AWO).*

The Liberty project is described as a service supported by a good core management system, with well trained and skilled staff with positive attitudes. The quality of relationships is highlighted as very important and is the fact that, within boundaries, staff will go the extra mile to support women and deliver a quality service. The compassion, patience and understanding staff demonstrate on a daily basis helps to engage the women and provide the very best recovery support for them.

A Way Out is committed to working collaboratively with a range of key partners, to help achieve common goals and objectives for the women. We work with the sex worker forum in Stockton, a small multi-agency partnership chaired by Community Safety, to help build support and facilitate change in women’s lives. We also take part in and are members of the Vulnerable Exploited Missing and Trafficked sub-group, which operates at a strategic level, to consider how services are best delivered to young vulnerable women, under the age of 18 in Stockton, and also are members of the operational Vulnerable Person’s Group in Stockton.

The project refers younger women on to Barnardo’s ACE project and other partners as appropriate. We recognise the importance of engaging and working with a range of organisations to help to address the diverse needs of our clients and to provide a holistic recovery support service.

In October 2016, we launched a new Big Lottery funded project, called the Blossom project. Blossom provides targeted support for young women aged 16 – 24 years living in the Stockton area who are at significant risk of poor outcomes, due to a range of vulnerabilities and complex needs. A key aspiration of the project is to prevent the exploitation of vulnerability and routes into survival sex work.

The service aims to empower and advocate for young women and support them to:

- Build emotional resilience and social capital
- Make positive life choices and
- Realise their aspirations/fulfil their potential

*“Vulnerable young women who access our service achieve a positive vision of womanhood, are purposefully engaged in education or training, free from addictions and exploitation and are empowered to live healthy and happy lives”. (CEO, AWO)*

We are currently working with 32 young women, with an average age of 18. We offer a range of prevention and early interventions to reach, engage and empower them.

## **Key Issues for AWO:**

- Women working on-line, from mobile phones and off-street, including 'pop up brothels'. The women working off street are less visible and need to be engaged and reached out to in different ways to the women who are on the street sex working. Services will need to be tailored and adapted to address the different and specific needs of the off-street client group.
- Migrant and newly emerging communities' involvement in sex work as buyers and sellers. Whilst there may be little evidence to date of this market in Stockton and Middlesbrough, this may be due to the hidden nature of selling sex within these communities and more needs to be done to try and gain access to and connect with the communities and the women.
- Capacity of the service with the interrelation of sex work and drug/alcohol, which is inextricably linked with relapses and crisis support, common within the first few years of a woman engaging with A Way Out. Capacity needs to be built in to help respond and react, whilst delivering a structured quality service.
- Expand the outreach service to include more sessions per week, to improve the reach and engagement with the women and also new women who are just starting to sex work. We are currently training up a number of volunteers to lead on one outreach session per week, to enable an evening, off site drop-in to take place in the community.

## **Policies and training for AWO:**

The organisation has clear Safeguarding policies for children and adults, as well as standard organisational policies for equality, diversity and confidentiality. We are about to launch our new revised drug and alcohol policy across the organisation, to assist staff to deal with complex, chaotic clients who struggle with substance misuse.

A Way Out is a member of the North East Sex Work Forum and takes part in the Regional Learning Day (RLD). The RLD is an event which presents an amazing opportunity to bring a range of services together across the North East to share, learn, grow and develop and helps to influence and shape service delivery.

The organisation has plans to develop training with others, through collaboration and partnership working. We are currently providing training for the police through their cultural diversity programme called "Everyone Matters", where we provide insight and awareness around sex working and vulnerability, common factors and strategies for engagement.

A Way Out continues to collaborate and strengthen relations with public health, the police and DLO, domestic and sexual violence organisations, housing and drug and alcohol and recovery programmes. We value our partners and will continue through our new strategic plan to nurture and grow our links with emerging services. Our vision and ambition for the

organisation has been captured within our strategic plan for the next three years, along with our aim to develop and expand our reach to women selling sex outside of the Stockton area.

*"We are absolutely committed to engaging with and responding to the needs of the poorest and those encountering a life of inequality and marginalisation within society. A Way Out has a mission to increase recognition of the needs of these women and to champion this work."* (CEO, AWO).

## **Barnardo's SECOS**

Barnardo's SECOS (Sexual Exploitation Children's Outreach Service) Project works to enable young people to exit and recover from sexual exploitation.

(<http://www.Barnardos.org.uk/secos>)

Barnardo's SECOS is a children's charity that has been in operation for 25 years. Although at the time of the research the project also worked with adult sex workers, this is now no longer the case and the focus of the service now is child sexual exploitation (CSE).

*"We continue to support young people turning 18-20- especially in the context of their vulnerability and links to networks of abuse/exploitation."* (Children's Service Manager in the North East).

Barnardo's SECOS runs several projects across the Tees Valley. The manager at the time of the research had been involved in research and practice to address CSE since 1998 and had a national implementation role in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) for Barnardo's to ensure the model is shared nationally.

SECOS is child focused and emerged from research in 1998 with young people who were selling sex and labelled as 'juvenile prostitutes'. As the review of the legislation and literature section shows, at this time, and until the 2003 Sexual Offences Act, girls under sixteen could be prosecuted for soliciting offences yet could not legally give consent to have sex.

*"We worked with vulnerable young women [and some men] on the street – prostitution was a long standing problem for Middlesbrough and we were failing children. We spoke to 75 women and 35 were under 17 and a large proportion were under 25. Some were 13/14 when they entered by exploitation from what we then called 'pimps', usually an older man and ended up working on street. Historically there are the links with the ports and prostitution/child sexual exploitation and records from the 40s/50s show this."* (Children's Service Manager in the North East)

The organisation takes a two pronged approach to addressing sexual exploitation and focuses on vulnerability, the safety/safeguarding of children and young people:

1. Tackle these areas and seek to improve them and raise the profile.
2. Work with children and young people and post 18 year olds in looked after/learning disabilities and women with children. The safety/safeguarding of children and women is at the core.

Barnardo's SECOS also run a programme for men who have been cautioned for soliciting offences, UR Choice

*"We have taken a strategic approach with men, following the lead of the Johns school but using a more empathic model. We would not take certain men, rather men with whom we had a chance. It's a day's course and so far only three have reoffended, that is good going. We don't name and shame, that is inappropriate as the wives, mothers, children bear the brunt."* (Children's Service Manager)

The main focus is the work with children and young people involved in or at risk of CSE. This is undertaken through:

Specific ISVA posts. The organisation employed the first children's ISVA in the country.

Group work and outreach. *"Outreach is in parks/food outlets (fast food and restaurants - employing young people) where young people go/gather and with taxi drivers to educate around safeguarding"*. (Children's Service Manager)

Working creatively to support children and young people. *"We use all means to engage, art, music and have some brilliant songs written from the young people"*. (Children's Service Manager)

Working in collaboration with police, UKBA and the tax office to improve child protection work. *"For example, visiting hotspots i.e., hotels and parties where we have had intelligence that suggests risk of exploitation to vulnerable young people; fast food outlets –free pizza for company/sex; restaurants where young people are paid as little as £4 per hour and then asked to stay on for parties (risk of grooming)."* (Children's Service Manager)

The development and delivery of bespoke training and resource packs to support early identification of vulnerability to exploitation through the Emotional Health and Wellbeing agenda.

The project takes a relational model and works with the complex needs of young people. *"If we can get it right with children and young people, increase self-esteem, improve the circle of people and peers in their lives we are going in the right direction"*.

*"I come from a relational model with young people who are sexually exploited I see failed relationships, failed attachments and trauma –we need to work with the*

*trauma and help the young people who are still developing. Everyone needs relationships and seeks relationships, this is intrinsic to everyone in society. Sex is also something we don't deal well with as a society, so much is sexualised and sexual abuse is hidden/secret. No wonder we are confused. A 15 year old is berated for disclosing sex with a 28 year old footballer; we saw this lot in the 60s and 70s. Having worked in CSE for over 25 years I have seen the shifts."* (Children's Service Manager)

For Barnardo's SECOS a joint approach is the best way forward to reinforce the rights of children and young people and to:

*"Model what we want to happen, for the area as well as for vulnerable young people; to protect, reinforce rights and prevent exploitation. The Saville case is an example of how confused we are. We worked so hard for rights and equality."*(Children's Service Manager)

### **Key Issues for Barnardo's SECOS:**

- Poverty is a major factor.
- Continue to develop a robust package of support around early identification through the provision of emotional health and wellbeing training and resource.
- New and emerging communities' involvement in sex work /sexual exploitation.
- How can we work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in a different way in order to:
  - Reduce the need for young people to get to CAMHS;
  - Bring CAMHS to the young people in settings they are familiar with;
  - Be more holistic – alcohol, drugs and mental health issues are related.

How can we work better with Police to ensure that young people who turn 18 are not then prosecuted for facilitating sexual exploitation when they introduce a friend to parties where sexual exploitation is taking place.

### **Policies and Training for Barnardo's SECOS:**

Barnardo's SECOS take a child protection and child centred approach to policies and training and in the interview stressed that this is part of a wider focus on being hospitable and transparent with young people, working with the police, social care and health.

The organisation contributed to the National Action Plan on CSE in 2011 and in 2015 and are currently writing a new action plan with the University of Bedfordshire and stay up to date with child led legislation and rights, protection and prevention. The relational model the service uses is embedded in supervision, training, counselling and practice.

*"In training we highlight the need to be genuine, be honest and be transparent, in the context of empathy, consistency and boundaries. A key question is 'do you like and*



*want to work with children?’ Dealing with the sense of failure too, as we have had deaths /losses and you can only do your best. Most importantly are care of self and working with each other as a team. Food, nurturing, hospitality are very important and in keeping with this we have an open door. We may arrive to find a young person has been at the door from the previous night, we need to get back to Maslow and start with basic needs and work up.” (Children’s Service Manager).*

## **Future plans for Barnardo’s SECOS include:**

Continued joint working and clearly defined collaborative training to ensure the best possible partnership and practice for preventing and protecting young people and adults.

## **Cleveland Police**

Cleveland constabulary covers the areas of Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar. Sex work is primarily the responsibility of the Licensing Support Unit a combined purpose unit incorporating “liquor and licensing issues” and sex work (CSE is picked up by another unit).

“The unit isn’t the only part of the police force to have responsibility – there are other units with regards to domestic abuse, vulnerability and child protection”.

The sergeant in the licensing unit described the role of the police and policing as follows:

*“From a policing point of view we have long adopted the approach to tackle the demand and to work with partnership agencies in order to provide routes out for women working on street.”*

*“A key part is working with agencies – SECOS and A Way Out in order to engage with sex workers. We have vulnerability meetings with partnership agencies; this is on a case by case basis in order to help individuals to tackle whatever it is that is pushing them into sex work. Meetings are chaired in Middlesbrough by a member of the local authority, in Stockton the Chair is Probation.”*

The police are also monitoring off street work and continually assess if there are any areas of concern.

*“In the main what we see is the on-street sex workers, and key to this is vulnerability – women becoming victims of crime. There is under-reporting so we don’t know who is involved, we also don’t know as much about indoors, as they are not committing criminal offences (through sale of sex indoors).”*

## Key Issues for Cleveland Police:

- Protecting vulnerable people.
- Tackling Demand. Kerb crawlers are targeted and offered a conditional caution. They can attend the one day course that Barnardo's SECOS runs. Over one hundred men have attended the course and three have re-offended. Each person pays £200 to attend the course.

The alternative is to be charged and to go to the magistrates courts for sentencing. Conditional caution is an alternative to prosecution so we have to have enough evidence to prosecute. If we don't have enough evidence then it would be NFA (no further action.)

- Shift in geographical locations: the policing representative described a shift in street sex work taking place in Middlesbrough; *"there are less women there now, much less out working"*.

The policing representatives described sex work in Stockton as being concentrated in one area and one specific road. The on-street market in Middlesbrough was described as having 'diminished' and there being a "larger problem in Stockton". Redcar and Hartlepool were described as not having significant sex work markets, some off-street but not the same levels as Stockton and Middlesbrough.

- Impact on residential communities. The complaints of some residents are brought to the attention of the police:

*"Residents are frightened to let their kids play out, women [residents] have been approached by men wanting sex, male residents have been approached by women offering sex, the women's boyfriends are hanging around and it is intimidating. Also there is concern over the discarding of used condoms in public areas – people are genuinely concerned to let their kids out and also the kind of people that are attracted to the area. We might know that kerb crawlers are not a specific threat to their children (although they might well be) but that doesn't mean parents know that – it's the fear of crime basically."* (Policing representative)

- Resources: having more staff and greater capacity.
- Having outreach services in the area. *"We're there to support people when a crime has been committed, if they are a victim of crime. We need other services to help people with their addiction, mental health etc."*
- Develop the DLO role and develop policies. *"The DLO is a licensing officer who has taken on the DLO role"*.

- Safety and wellbeing of the women. The importance of being able to approach the DLO/Police *“whether they have to sex work or choose to sex work, that they feel they can approach the police, trust us and communicate with us so we can support them”*.

## **Policies, Practice and Training for Cleveland Police:**

There is no specific policy relating to sex work for Cleveland Police and general policies such as the *Victims Code* applies regardless of sex work status.

*“Whilst not set out in policy the general force strategy is in relation to working with partner agencies to find routes out. Arresting the women is not the focus of police activity, it’s clearly not the way forward. The women need support with various issues, much of it is drugs and alcohol driven, or they are being coerced in some way, or they have mental health issues; they have limited choices as to why they are selling sex.”* (Policing representative)

Training courses are attended at Barnardo’s SECOS *“a lot of what we do sits under vulnerability”* and Police officers attend and have spoken at the North East Sex Work Forum Regional learning day.

Developing the DLO role as well as working with the out-reach services in Teesside were highlighted as important developments in policing sex work and child sexual exploitation.

*“Cleveland Police have no plans to introduce a tolerance zone at present. We would have concerns given the current legal position on Loitering, and additional concerns over the safety of a zone given the murder of Dario Pionko in the Leeds zone”* (Policing representative).

## **Future plans and developments for Cleveland Police:**

The Designated Liaison Officer Role is a relatively new role at Cleveland Police with two in the police force (one is currently seconded on operational matters elsewhere) compared to twenty one in the Northumbria force.

One of the DLO officers, described the role as

*“To build relationships with sex workers and organisations in Teesside and to increase reporting of offences in order to catch and convict and hopefully reduce the number of crimes against sex workers”*.

It is important to mention that the DLO is not involved in any enforcement activity.

Continue to sustain very good working relationships with A Way Out, Barnardo’s SECOS and partner agencies.

*“Ideally that the women will call us when needed, that they are comfortable coming straight to us. 24hr coverage (in terms of DLO provision) would be perfect. That they would have more confidence in reporting – after all we’re here in this job to get the bad guys, we want the women to be comfortable in reporting and also after reporting to not withdraw from the CJS process.” (Policing representative)*

It is important to note that The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) with the College of Policing (2015) has agreed to *National Policing Sex Work Guidance*, revised guidance being circulated to Police Forces in England, Wales & Northern Ireland and adopted by Police Forces in England & Wales. The guidance states that *“sex workers should not be approached as offenders per se but people who may become victims of crime for whom police services have a responsibility to protect”* and that *“as a law enforcement agency, the safety of people engaged in sex work must be paramount to the police service”*. The guidance supports the National Ugly Mugs scheme and encourages forces to scope their local sex work scene ideally within a multi-agency context, because *“enforcement alone has proven to be an inadequate solution”*. The guidance *“acknowledges the distinct differences and challenges presented by street and indoor and internet based sex work”* (2015:6). Moreover, the guidance states that *“ill-considered use of language, such as the term ‘vice’ is not professional nor acceptable for modern day police forces”*.

## **Agencies working indirectly with women**

The agencies working indirectly with women or supporting Arch, A Way Out and Barnardo’s SECOS offer the following support:

- Multi-agency partnerships and meetings including Safer Stockton partnership;
- Commissioning services for victims and specialist ISVA role;
- Commissioning services for drug treatment;
- Clinical provision including sexual health, drug use support, contraception and signposting to other agencies;
- Support with training needs (AWO);
- Referring women on to support agencies (AWO and SECOS);
- Delivering and receiving ‘awareness’ training support for volunteers from AWO;
- Public Health, sexual health commissioners who fund an “integrated health service with SBC a hub and spoke clinics model funding CRI, Lifeline, drug and alcohol, young

people's services and health visiting." This includes funding for sexual health for AWO;

- Public health commissioning services for drug treatment provide pathways to mental health and housing and working on the barriers to treatment;
- Housing Options support linked with Safer Stockton, Drug treatment, 'housing pathways' in relation to sex workers.

The knowledge and experience of the local sex markets and lived experiences of the women is patchy across the stakeholders we interviewed. This knowledge was concentrated in those agencies offering front line face to face support.

There is a centre or hub of expertise in the agencies directly working with women selling sex: AWO, the Police/DLO, ISVA at Arch and Barnardo's SECOS, along with other front line agencies such as the specialist nurse practitioner and drug workers.

Historically and currently the commissioned and funded work of these projects has focused on street sex workers, yet the Arch specialist ISVA service since its establishment has been promoted to sex workers in all sectors.

Participants described their knowledge of sex work as ranging from knowledge gained through experience of working in agencies working directly with sex workers (n=2) one of these participants described working in front line services and so *"know the hotspots and how hidden this work is"* but described being *"not quite up to date with law and policies"*.

Others described having knowledge limited to working in Teesside and being aware of workers in the local area or their knowledge is limited to being involved in case conferences.

Hence, those working indirectly had varying degrees of knowledge and understanding about sex work as well as local, regional and national issues.

*"Deprivation, unemployment all make it more difficult to break free from sex work. High deprivation fosters sex work."*(Public health stakeholder).

## **Key Issues Agencies Working Indirectly with Women:**

The main issues both locally, regionally and nationally were described as:

- Safety of sex workers *"The women's vulnerability is exploited;"*
- Reporting violence and assaults to the police;
- On street sex work takes place in Stockton and Middlesbrough;

- The intersection of drug use and sex work, as mutually reinforcing;
- On line sex work “We don’t know the bigger picture with the internet and the sex industry;”
- Awareness of complex needs;
- Housing and the need for a wraparound support for street sex workers;  
*“Creating the right support for those allocated accommodation.”*  
*“We have bricks and mortar but frequently we would like to manage the tenancies better but there is a lack of a wraparound service and that is what’s needed”*
- The impact on sex workers health, family and children;
- Local Residents responses and tensions when sex work is visible on street;
- Newly emerging communities and interaction with sex markets as purchasers and sellers (i.e. failed asylum seekers involvement in selling or swapping sex);
- Some Asylum seeking/refugee men purchasing sex have undertaken the ‘Johns School’ course with Barnardo’s;
- More information sharing needed with and for asylum and refugee support organisations.

## **Main Sources of Knowledge for Stakeholders**

The main sources of knowledge in the North East for those agencies providing indirect support were described as:

- Barefoot Research
- Experience in role and for some past work *“past experience as an outreach worker on harm minimisations and drug use.”*
- Information sharing:

Participating in Safer Middlesbrough partnership;

Participating in safer Stockton partnership;

Participating in the Regional Learning Day (organised by the North East Sex Work Forum);

- Relationship with A Way Out through the training and awareness raising offered.

## Policies, Practices and Training

To get a sense of the policies that underpin the provision of services to sex workers in Teesside and also to understand what training is undertaken or offered, we asked stakeholders to tell us about their policies, training and practice.

For participant organisations working directly with sex workers policies included:

- Child protection model (SECOS Barnardo's);
- Safeguarding child and adult and organisational policies (A Way Out);
- National Policing Guidance (2015).

For participant organisations working indirectly with sex workers policies included:

- Safety/safeguarding policies such as vulnerable adult policy.

There is a limited amount of training offered in the area too, beyond the training offered by A Way Out (on adult sex work) and Barnardo's SECOS (on CSE).

It appears that there is currently no training on sex work or sex work related issues for magistrates, indeed one stakeholder interviewed said that a limited number of sex workers come to the attention of magistrates.

Health workers describe training on sexual assault and rape, but not sex work.

We asked if stakeholders were comfortable discussing sex work in their agencies and there was a mixed response, most said *"no problem"* *"they would not be treated any differently"*, others said *"some are"* or *"some staff are"* and some said *"we haven't got the specific skills"*. One stakeholder was clear that *"stigma and fear of disclosure would make a difference for sex workers accessing the service."*

The majority of agencies aimed to provide a *"victim focused non-judgemental service"*.

We asked agencies if they worked with A Way Out and Barnardo's SECOS, and it is not surprising, given the adult focus of the research, that more agencies worked with A Way Out. Some agencies made referrals of young people to Barnardo's SECOS and some had training around CSE from Barnardo's.

## What is the Gold Standard for practice in Teesside?

We asked what the gold standard is for practice when working with sex workers and the response was unanimous.

- A multi-agency approach that is needs led, with 24 hour DLO provision that would enable sex workers to be more confident in reporting.
- Increased service provision, having more staff and resources available.
- A full wrap around service, this was seen as especially important. “A holistic intervention, from the right services at an appropriate time”
- Greater access for women in prison to mental health and drug misuse support and greater support into accommodation on leaving prison.
- “For sex workers to understand that victim support has a lot to offer and is for everyone”
- “A health/substance misuse focus with a three way meeting with A Way Out, Birchtree and the patient agreed and bi-monthly”

## Further Training

The majority of agencies would welcome training and further collaboration too. For these agencies there is either no specific training on sex work and sexual health training takes place in-house.

For participants working in sexual health, they see *“termination rates go up following unsafe sex, we would like collaboration and further learning and training.”*

Some but not all of the agencies attended the North East Sex Work Forum Regional Learning day and those unaware were keen to know more.

*“Yes the RLD is an amazing opportunity to bring people together to learn, or re-learn learning; the speakers were great!”*

Further training in sex work lifestyles and complexity, how to work with sex workers and engage them better, from the initial contact, framing and phrasing questions to gain better knowledge and to better understand the issues.

Work with the North East Sex Work forum and key stakeholders to develop a regional strategy.

One stakeholder said *“A regional strategy and increased joint working would make me happy.”*

Some participants would like to see the DLO role developed and connected with future training.



## Summary of Key Points in Stakeholder Interviews

- Policing sex work is marked by targeting kerb crawlers and supporting women, a two pronged approach that enforces the law around kerb crawlers/purchasers and a welfare based approach to sex workers. The welfare based approach is enhanced by the recently appointed DLO role (two officers).
- The safety and support of sex workers was highlighted as a priority within a multi-agency frame work.
- That routes into reporting for sex workers who have experienced violence are better utilised.
- One stakeholder felt that the safety of sex workers needs to become a public protection issue and sex workers should not be criminalised.
- Another stakeholder, whilst not in favour of the Nordic model was not in favour of managed areas either, as in Leeds<sup>20</sup>, but rather the current model of *“targeting kerb crawlers and supporting women”*. So a combined welfare for adult street sex workers approach and enforcement approach to kerb crawlers, purchasers was strongly defined in a number of interviews with key stakeholders as the *Teesside/Cleveland approach* to adult street sex work.
- In Stockton the core services working with adult sex workers meet as a ‘multi-agency’ partnership to support adult sex workers.
- All of those interviewed are keen to support adult sex workers, but have limited resources and limited knowledge and understanding of some staff members.

*“Not asking direct questions is standard practice within organisations/service for sex workers, but staff could be helped with training in engaging women involved in sex work, to break down barriers and better work with women to support their needs. Some staff in agencies not working directly with women may hold negative views or may not be aware of the prevailing problems women face.”* (Sexual health participant)
- Sexual Health understand the needs of sex workers, but the standard assessment remains ‘difficult’ for some sex workers to answer in full, e.g., questions about number of partners etc. The women typically do not answer or provide inaccurate information. The assessment accuracy in information coming from sex workers has

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<sup>20</sup> The murder of a sex worker in the Leeds managed area was raised as an example of it not working, however, a stakeholder pointed to the fact that the witness volunteered information because of feeling safe with the managed area and relations with the local police. Now known through the openness of witness – this would not have happened i.e. witness volunteers information, but for the model in place.

been discussed between A Way Out and sexual health lead providers within Public Health, and if the questions in the assessment can be changed.

- It is clear from Public Health that this information needs to be completed, at local and national level, to monitor the prevalence of STIs and contraction of STIs. It brings into question therefore that inaccurate reporting misrepresents the overall monitoring. There are sexual health clinics services in Birchtown, Lawson St and Middlesbrough, but it was suggested that lot of sex workers are not engaging, those that do, are known as more 'regulars.'
- Training is the key area that all stakeholders are very keen to access. They are keen to understand more about the needs of sex workers both on and off street, but predominantly on street because off street is such a hidden population, and agencies connect more with on street adult workers.
- Training could be developed by the key agencies in collaboration with the North East Sex Work Forum. Areas identifies where staff -in agencies need support is:  
*"Legislation and the law, understanding sex working, pathways to health/recovery and well-being as well as the safety needs of women."*
- Women's housing needs. Whilst one participant said that '*bricks and mortar*' were not the problem, there was housing available, how to give women the best start in independent living is currently lacking and more so for women leaving prison who are not supported into accommodation.
- Working with new and emerging communities.
- Developing the DLO Role in Teesside to better support women and address violence and sexual violence against them.

## Summary & Recommendations

This section will summarise the key themes emerging from the research, document the key messages from the dissemination and consultation event (held at the Lindisfarne Conference Centre, Durham University on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016) and draw together the main themes and recommendations in conclusion.

It is hoped that the learning and knowledge transfer enabled by the participatory research approach will continue through the actions, interventions and networking of all stakeholders. It has been a pleasure working with you all.

## Research Aims

The research has fulfilled its aims and objectives in that it has:

- Documented the lived experience and needs of women selling sex, both on and off street, including their use and experience of support services;
- Documented the experience of key stakeholders providing services to women selling sex, both on and off street, (through front line support or through the commissioning of services);
- Documented the key issues highlighted by both sex workers and stakeholders;
- Produced targeted information for local service providers, policy-makers and key regulators in the region, in order to facilitate the development of service provision to a 'gold standard' based on the needs of women.
- Contributed to research, academic and policy debates in the North East region but also nationally. This is a time of change with regard to legislation and policy guidance relating to sex work as evidenced by the National Policing Guidance and the Interim Home Affairs Committee Report published in July 2016.
- Used a participatory peer driven methodology that has in turn built the research capacity of A Way Out and enhanced the skills and experience of the community co-researchers. This was strongly evidenced at the participatory research dissemination and consultation event held at Durham University in July 2016.

A participatory approach underpinned by the principles of inclusion, participation, valuing all voices and action oriented interventions (O'Neill 2001) puts the women (who are usually the subjects of research) at the centre of the research as community co-researchers. This research process has gathered, documented and analysed sex workers experiences of services and stakeholders experiences of the sex workers using their services. The key issues and interventions that sex workers and stakeholders told us are important, for moving

forward and improving services and women's lives are documented in the recommendations presented later in this section of the report.

## **Comparison with PEER research published by Changing Lives, Tyne & Wear 2013**

When we embarked on this research we did so with an eye on the points of comparison and learning across Tyne and Wear and Teesside. There are clear similarities with the PEER research findings undertaken by Changing Lives in Tyne and Wear and also funded by Northern Rock (Laing and Irving 2013). The similarities include: the limited knowledge base in some services accessed by the women, with a concentration of knowledge in core services; this knowledge is mostly about on street sex work (with limited knowledge about off street work); feeling judged by services, especially the police and social services; concerns about violence against sex workers as well as domestic violence; and the specific demographics and experiences of on and off street workers.

Similarities for *on street* workers across Tyne and Wear and Teesside include: routes in; age on starting sex work; experiences of drug addiction and types of drugs taken; housing and homelessness; experiences of sexual and domestic violence; and the women's experience of support services.

Similarities for *off street* workers/escorts include: the majority were over the age of 18 when they started to sell sex; an overall positive outlook on sex working and low (Tyne and Wear) to no (Teesside) reported drug use. The Tyne and Wear sample reported overall positive experiences with support services whereas the Teesside sample reported mixed experiences and specifically wanted non-judgemental health services.

A clear difference between the two research projects is that the Teesside escorts did not report the prevalence of mental health issues and needs reported by Laing and Irving (2013) in Tyne and Wear.

In Teesside, the aspirations of *on street sex workers* are related to: getting off and staying off drugs; moving on from supported accommodation into secure accommodation, owning a flat or having one's own home; getting children back from local authority care; getting 'clean' from drug use; working to help other people; getting a job; moving forward with their lives, and going back to College.

The aspirations of the *off street sex workers* in Teesside are: being able to use their money better, to generate savings; to get on the property ladder; to return to education; to set up a business or get a different job; and to provide for their older age.

Similarities across the stakeholder interviews in both Tyne and Wear and Teesside include: mixed knowledge about local sex markets and national policy, with knowledge concentrated

around on street sex work; all services said that multi-agency working was the gold standard with services in Teesside advocating a 'wrap around' support, especially linked to supported housing and for women leaving prison.

In Teesside all of the stakeholders wanted access to training around these issues and those who were not aware of the North East Sex Work Forum and the Regional Learning day wanted to know more and to attend the next event.

The research presented in both reports draws heavily on the voices and experiences of women selling sex both on and off street and the services that support them.

## **Regional Outcomes**

The need for a *regional* strategy was highlighted by the Teesside research and both studies stressed the importance of the development of the DLO role.

To realise a regional strategy we recommend that key stakeholders continue to work together in participatory ways. The North East Sex Work Forum, Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria Police forces, the three Police and Crime Commissioners and the multi-agency forums in each area could work in partnership to develop a regional strategy on sex work and sexual exploitation. This partnership could also support and ensure sustainable funding for core support services.

The North East region is developing a strong profile for conducting peer led research; much of this has been funded by the Northern Rock Foundation. The findings from this research could form the basis for an excellent training programme for front line services that support sex workers.

The stakeholders and research team are very concerned at the level of violence experienced by sex workers and that sex workers do not feel able, or want to report this to the police. The DLO role is very important in gaining the trust of sex workers, working with support agencies and should be embedded in any future policing strategy for Cleveland. Currently one DLO operates in Teesside and only a percentage of her time is spent on sex work matters. This contrasts with around twenty one DLOs in Northumbria.

It is recommended that Cleveland Police and the multi-agency forum consider the Merseyside Hate Crime approach as one way forward in policing violence against sex workers.

In the context of the National Policing Guidance and the interim report of the Home Affairs Select Committee published in July 2016<sup>21</sup>, it is hoped that the following information from

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<sup>21</sup> *The Home Affairs Select Committee report recommends that it should be a matter of urgency for the government to decriminalize on street sex work and to change the law to enable sex workers to work legally*

the dissemination event and the recommendations emerging from both this event (and the research) will support the ongoing work of stakeholders to improve the lives and life chances of women selling sex in Teesside.

## **Stakeholder Dissemination/Consultation Event**

In keeping with the participatory approach to this research, the research team presented the key findings to stakeholders on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at the Lindisfarne Conference Centre, Durham University. The stakeholders who attended the event included commissioners, police and criminal justice agencies, Low Newton prison, magistrates, sexual health and drug agency representatives, supported housing, community safety, youth offending, Open Clasp Women's Theatre Company, UNISON women's network and the North East Women's Network.

Following the presentation by the research team the stakeholders were invited to work together in six small groups to reflect upon and respond to the following questions<sup>22</sup>.

- Given the key messages in the research, is there anything else that you would have liked us to include –have we missed anything?
- Are there any further recommendations that you would like to see included, based on the key messages contained in the research?
- How might you use this research?
- What changes/interventions would you like to see happen as a result of this research?

The key points from this feedback are documented in Appendix A as they appeared on the flipcharts. Direct quotations are in italics.

The discussions and findings mirrored the findings in the research, indeed it was heartening to see the findings and key messages reinforced. The consultation also raised key themes for further research. We asked the stakeholders if we had missed anything. Those attending said that they wanted to know more about the following:

- the scale and levels of exploitation by partners, clients and services;
- the process women experience when they report violence against them;
- the impact of sex working on wider familial relations;

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*together off street, alongside government policy currently taking a robust response, using current legislation, to address sexual exploitation and CSE.*

<sup>22</sup> The stakeholders formed six groups; each group was given a flip chart and asked to nominate someone to feedback to the whole group.

- the incidence and experience of domestic violence, substance misuse, benefit sanctions;
- policing sex work both on and off street;
- transition from prison;
- the extent of involvement with social services and with the social care system;
- the impact of loss and the impact of losing children to social services;
- the impact of austerity and funding cuts;
- research on male and transworkers;
- for off street workers more knowledge about the different organisations, establishments and management styles.

The discussion group led by the community co-researchers indicated that domestic violence and coercion and control were a big issue on street.

In our final discussion it was suggested that the transition from prison to community and indeed levels of support in prison could be the basis for the next regional research project alongside the impact of sex work, drug misuse, and social stigma on the families of sex workers and the experience and impact of benefit sanctions.

Experiences of escort agencies; experiences of male and trans workers; and routes out of sex work are all topics for future research and greater knowledge and understanding in the North East region.

The community co-researchers who attended the event were unanimous in reinforcing the need for their voices to be central to our research and practice in Teesside and that they *'are aware that resources are limited support needs to be in place and if it is put into the right places, it will impact and the impact will be huge!'*

The stakeholder event was really helpful, not only in facilitating the responses from and involvement of key stakeholders, but also in triangulating the research findings, to see where the gaps are and where future research may be of benefit to the North East Region.

The participatory approach was valued by all and it was important for those who had contributed to the research to be involved in the final consultation and in agreeing recommendations and ways forward. This increased the commitment of stakeholders and services to support and develop actions and interventions based on the research findings.

## Recommendations

### Women Selling Sex On Street

Recommendations from street sex workers focused on:

- **developing positive relationships with the police and for the police to consider the impact of some of their policies i.e. begging crackdown, ASBOs for sex work;**
- **the vital need to address safety and violence;**
- **women's experiences of domestic violence on street;**
- **more support around housing and on release from prison;**
- **non-judgemental treatment in services, not being judged and treated differently because women sell sex on street and use drugs;**
- **for the police to link more with organisations such as A Way Out to increase reporting and trust in the police.**
- ***'Include our voices and listen to us'*. More opportunities to be involved in participatory research.**

We are happy to report that through the DLO role, as evidenced in the Policing section of the literature review, relationships with the police and with frontline services such as A Way Out are being developed. What has also become clear in the course of the research is the development of a welfare based approach taken by the Licensing Unit to women selling sex on street in Teesside. However, the figures documented in the literature review section of this report, gained through an FOI request, illustrates that this has not always been the case, as women have been targeted and punished to a greater degree than their male clients.

Women would like the following.

- **more support, particularly around housing, benefit sanctions and literacy, numeracy and computer skills, to support their basic needs and aspirations;**
- **non-judgemental support from social services;**
- **non-judgemental support from all services is imperative;**
- **support on release from prison;**



- training for services to better understand and engage with sex workers. For example, training and support so that staff might ask appropriate questions of sex workers - in order to get the best outcomes all round;
- address sexual and domestic violence, coercion and control of women selling sex as a matter of urgency.

## **Women selling sex off street**

Recommendations from off street sex workers focus upon the following.

- managing the stigma and secrecy experienced by sex workers;
- non-judgemental support from agencies, so that women can feel confident in being open about their working lives;
- gaining practical help and information around tax and earnings;
- developing positive relationships with the DLO in Teesside; to have more DLO posts in Teesside and related to this, more support for escort agencies that provide safe environments and working practices;
- access to information in order to legally manage their earnings within the law.

Women would like:

- to work with the DLOs in Teesside to help build more positive relationships with the police and to maintain safer working practices;
- to feel safer in reporting violence to police;
- support for escort agencies that provide safe working practices for escorts and address those escort agencies that operate exploitative working practice/conditions;
- non-judgemental health services with tailored health services for escorts/sex workers;
- information on legal ways to manage earnings and information on the law.

## **Stakeholder Recommendations.**

It is interesting that the services supporting sex workers made similar recommendations to the sex workers. These recommendations were enriched by the contributions of stakeholders at the dissemination event. Stakeholders made the following recommendations.

- a welfare based approach to policing sex work that is enhanced by the recent appointment of the two DLOs (non-arresting licensing officers) to Teesside [however, it is important to note that only one is active and she spends around 20% of her time on sex work matters;
- the safety of sex workers is addressed as a priority. Domestic and sexual violence, coercion and control should not be tolerated. It would be helpful to Teesside to look at the Merseyside model which treats violence against sex workers as ‘hate crime’;
- promote ‘National Ugly Mugs’ with off street workers;
- multi-agency partnership working to support sex workers as the gold standard;
- to work with sex workers and front line sex work support agencies to improve accuracy in the information gathered about sexual health;
- to better support and engage women to use sexual health services and more regularly;
- to better support women leaving prison into independent living (more resources would be helpful);
- to commission services that have women’s voices, needs and participation included right from the start – as opposed to professionals determining what is needed;
- to develop training for all agencies that support sex workers;
- to embed training across the region within a national policy context;
- to develop a regional strategy in collaboration with the three Police and Crime Commissioners, three police force areas and the North East Sex Work Forum;
- to continue to develop peer led research in this area and sustain women’s involvement and create spaces for their voices to be heard.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the research team agreed that all of these recommendations are possible and that many are not dependent on additional resources. It is imperative that front line services such as A Way Out, Arch specialist ISVA continue to be funded, alongside Barnardo’s SECOS work (CSE); and that services supporting sex workers in sexual health, housing and drug advice and support continue to be funded as a matter of priority.

There is a wealth of expertise in the region. Together, the key support services, the local multi-agency fora and the regional North East Sex Work Forum have an enormous amount of expertise and knowledge that can be used to improve the lives of the women, men and young people and facilitate research and development in this area.

It is important to highlight that any further work and interventions in the North East are mindful of the Home Affairs Committee's interim report on de-criminalisation and women working together to support their safety as well as the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) operational guidance on sex work. With the progressive work emerging in Cleveland to build confidence amongst sex workers in the police, it is imperative that Cleveland Constabulary support the NPCC national guidance.

The research team strongly recommend that all stakeholders continue to work together to create change and to make these recommendations and interventions happen to improve women's lives and the services that support them.

It is hoped that this research will facilitate the development of harm minimisation approaches that embed participatory approaches in the commissioning, running and the evaluation of services for sex workers in the North East.

## **Gaps and challenges for the future development and delivery of services**

There are some clear gaps and challenges that emerged during the research and as a consequence of the stakeholder dissemination and consultation event. It is therefore both important for stakeholders, commissioners and the PCC to reflect upon the following:

- 1. It is important for services to think through the transition from child/young people to adult services. This is a key challenge especially in the context of changes in legislation and policy guidance. Barnardo's SECOS have a long history and expertise in CSE, working with children and young people. A regional working group to look at 'transitions' that includes Barnardo's SECOS, would be very helpful for addressing the needs of young people/young adults who are transitioning from child to adult services and in the context of the current legislation.**
- 2. A better understanding of male and trans sex work is needed across the region.**
- 3. A better understanding of the work undertaken in prison and the support available for women on release from prison back into communities is needed.**
- 4. It would be helpful for services to identify opportunities for brief interventions in their ongoing support to women, as highlighted by sex workers in the main section of this report. This was endorsed at the dissemination event for stakeholders.**

- 5. It is vital that stakeholders and the North East Regional Forum on Sex Work consider how to address sexual and domestic violence against sex workers, including coercion and control.**
- 6. A better understanding of the impact of sex work, drug misuse, and social stigma on the families of sex workers would be valuable.**
- 7. Better knowledge and understanding of the experience and impact of benefit sanctions (highlighted by some women in our sample) is needed.**
- 8. It would be helpful have better knowledge and understanding about the operation of escort agencies across the region.**
- 9. A better understanding of routes out of sex work (desistance).**
- 10. A better understanding of the needs and experiences of migrant and newly emerging communities as residents, as providers and as purchasers of sex both on and off street.**

Finally and most importantly, the research team sincerely hope that the recommendation for a Regional Strategy is actioned in the North East, inclusive of the voices of sex workers (on and off street) and a gold standard multiagency approach at the very centre.

It has been a privilege to undertake this research with A Way Out and with the peer researchers. We sincerely hope it both supports, and forms, an evidence base for future practice, policy and research.

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## Appendix A to Hidden Stories:

### Question 1. Is there anything else you would have liked us to include in the research-have we missed anything?

In summary, the six groups highlighted the following issues:

- The level of earnings for on and off street working and where it is spent;
- Levels of exploitation by partners or by agencies;
- What happens when women report violence to the police, courts and social services?
- The extent to which women have been involved in the social care system as children;
- The impact felt by children of sex workers and the related experiences of sex workers who are parents. For example, 'not a proper mother' was mentioned as well as the repeated trauma of loss in 'losing children to social services';
- On street workers experiences with social services, what is the impact of loss?
- Experiences of domestic violence, especially on street;
- Experiences of substance misuse;
- Any cultural differences, for example, traveller community or bme groups;
- The use of National Ugly Mugs by off street workers;
- The experiences of Escort Agencies and Escort Agency Managers;
- The research highlighted escorts who work for agencies, what about the experiences of independent sex workers.
- Supporting women into the community on release from prison;
- The impact of benefit sanctions;
- There is a focus on routes into sex work and we also need to see a focus on positive routes out of sex work;
- The research only worked with women, what about the men?
- The impact on the women is clear but what about the impact on women's families? They suffer the same stigma and it would be good to have their voices heard;



- What is stopping progressive legislation and what is missing in public knowledge around sex work? The public need to be informed about sex work;
- The differences between experiences on and off street;
- More direct quotes and case studies;
- More about route in and routes out. More about the aspirations of sex workers;
- Locate the research in local and national policies and provide more information about the policing of sex work by Cleveland police;
- The research shows a snapshot in time but it would be good to know more about the impact of austerity.

The research team responded to these comments by first of all reinforcing that the full report contained much of this information and that it was not possible to do full justice to the content of the report in a 45 minute presentation. Given the focus of the research brief, inevitably some of the issues raised in the research would need to be looked at more closely, through further research.

However, some of the comments and questions raised are very important in that they highlight gaps in knowledge and understanding in the region. For example, the levels of domestic violence experienced by on street sex workers. The discussion group led by the community co-researchers indicated that domestic violence and coercion and control were a big issue on street.

The transition from prison to community and indeed levels of support in prison could be the basis for future research alongside the impact of sex work, drug misuse, and social stigma on the families of sex workers. The experience and impact of benefit sanctions (highlighted by some women in our sample); experiences of escort agencies; experiences of male and trans workers; and routes out of sex work are all topics for future research and greater knowledge and understanding in the North East region.

**Question 2. Are there any further recommendations that you would like to see included based on the key messages contained in the research?**

- There is effectively only one DLO in Teesside and she spends only 20% of time on sex work related issues with the remaining 80% spent on licensing issues. The DLO is a critical role to build trust with the police and to increase the reporting of crimes against sex workers. More DLO posts in Teesside would be very beneficial. Resources are needed to create further DLO posts in Teesside and to address this gap.
- There is a need to upskill some frontline policing staff about the experiences and needs of sex workers as well as the role of the DLO.
- More pathways could be developed to support women on release from prison.
- *A 'Safe zone is key to us, the biggest thing. If it's in one place and the police can monitor this it would be a helpful recommendation.'* Provide a 'Safe Zone' for sex workers in Teesside.
- Women selling sex need to be represented and enabled to speak at local and national levels: *'You can't speak for us.'* In Teesside we need *'the right people in the right places, asking the right questions and listening to us. We (women selling sex) need to have centre stage.'*
- *'Given that the funding for Barnardo's has shifted in terms of priorities, there is now only A Way Out offering a service to adult sex workers. A Way Out can only work with people from Stockton. More funding/resources are needed to support adult sex workers in Teesside'.*
- Accommodation needs are a priority for on street sex workers. Women need to have a good base to start from in order to move forward.
- *'Women who are in transition, coming out of prison, might have nowhere to live, no benefits, no prescription if you're on drugs and nowhere to go. We need to think about addressing the needs of women leaving prison'.*
- *'Why are we imprisoning women instead of offering wraparound services? Women working on street are the most vulnerable; we need resources to support them in Teesside and we need to reflect on the capacity of the DLO role.'*
- Sexual health services need to ask *'different questions to get the most useful and correct information to support women and capture accurate data'.*

- It is vitally important that we tackle stigma and use better language in our dealings with sex workers; and make sure that language is phrased in ways that do not put people off using the services. It is important to accept and not judge sex workers.
- It is important to include and address the women who are '*dual workers*' who sell sex and also have other jobs. They are a hidden population.
- The research could be used in a public education role; in order for residents to be better informed. The Unison Women representatives said they would take the messages from the research back to their membership.
- Develop Training courses for front line workers using different methods e.g., drama / creative work. '*Women engaged in these methods surprise themselves with their eagerness to participate and contribute and they can then 'enact' alternative options and choice*'.
- One group questioned the purpose of criminalising the women and in relation to the off street workers asked: '*What is stopping women being able to bank their earnings and use their money as they wish?*'
- More description of the differences in experiences between on and off street workers.
- More direct quotes and case studies.
- Strengthen the focus on aspirations.
- '*The visual material is very helpful and it would be great to see more visuals in the research*'.

### **Question 3. How might you use this research?**

- To ask different questions at sexual health clinics.
- To think about women who are working off street and who have dual roles.
- To think about ways of tackling stigma; and the need to use better language with women to engage them and make them feel accepted.
- Update the 'Prison sex work in communities and custody (SWICC) programme' as the current data is from 2009. We can update and use more local examples from this research.
- Promote and develop a Regional Strategy as indicated in the research report, contextualised within national policy and policing guidance.
- Ensure we continue to build in Peer led research into future work.
- Raise awareness around the risks for women experiencing domestic violence, drug use and who are also parents.
- More interventions to address the links between poverty and homelessness.
- Greater understanding of desistance from sex work and why women return to sex work rather than judging them; greater understanding of the cycle of routes in, out and back in again would be helpful.
- *'Promote National Ugly Mugs with off street workers. Off street lasses hadn't heard of ugly mugs. This is important because on/off street lasses have the same clients – we need off street workers to know about ugly mugs and report clients.'*
- To counter stereotypes such as the mainstream media glamourizing of sex work or seeing it as seedy.
- There is a clear need for a multi-agency training programme. People want this training. This research could also be used to train staff. Staff need to feel comfortable asking questions.
- How will future research in this area be funded? Northern Rock cannot fund any more research but obviously this needs to take place and we need to consider where the funding will come from?
- *This is local research but the findings will resonate elsewhere. How do we make this piece of work live and have implications nationally outside the region? There is a national conversation going on, we are likely to have new policy. We need to have the*

*women's voices heard. Not just in reading the research – they need to come here and listen to women.*

- Encourage and ensure that future research in the region is Peer Led.
- Commission wider services.
- Tackle Stigma.
- Use the research in the transition from prison, e.g. prescriptions, housing support, benefits- all need to be sorted before release!
- This research will support the Unison Regional Women's Network campaigns. We feel we are now better informed when we link to public debate, e.g. Home Office Select Committee's decriminalisation for women selling sex.

One of the community co-researchers said:

*"It touches me to be here today, it is a big deal for all the girls, and we would never have been here. If I had the help I needed when I was 15 I wouldn't be here now."*

***Question 4. What changes/interventions would you like to see happen as a result of this research?***

- A Wraparound Support plan for women.
- Raising awareness around drugs & risks for women.
- More intervention in relation to the links between poverty & homelessness.
- Risk assessment around benefit sanctions.
- Look into the reasons why people return to sex work on leaving prison.
- The need for a Regional Strategy in the context of National Policy.
- Employment – look at what services exist to increase opportunities for women, taking into account their aspirations.
- The Commissioning of wider services.
- Tackle Stigma and address the language used (around sex working) by the front line services working with women.
- We would like to see more support provided for women, instead of custody and better use of resources, e.g., residential supported housing for women to enable them to leave sex work.
- Use the research as a basis for a multiagency training programme and target key statutory front-line staff and managers.
- Reflect upon how we get the voices from this work into national debates.
- How do we ensure women's voices and peer research continue to be sought and amplified in the future? There is a key role for academics and independent grant makers.
- *National launch-how can we help you get this out?*

There was overwhelming support for the research, the participatory research process and the recommendations and interventions from those stakeholders present. To conclude the event, before the lunch and networking, Professor O'Neill (Chair of the event) asked all present the following question:

***Question 5. What will you do as a consequence of being here today, taking part and hearing about the research?***

The stakeholders answered as follows.

- *We want to hear more of the women's voices. We can't judge, we shouldn't judge and the research helps to better inform people and services.*
- *I will challenge more some of the language I hear, I still hear language around sex work that is so damaging, so unhelpful. I will actively challenge more.*
- *How we commission services – and make sure we get the voices of women into the specifications of what we do right at the start – as opposed to professionals determining what is needed.*
- *I would like to share the research with other projects and get some of this information to other forums as well.*
- *I would like to take it back to the rest of the women's UNISON network in England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland.*
- *From a Youth Offending perspective this research is really important to use, to recognise and respond to the girls, women and boys who come into contact with our services.*
- *The research and discussion has made me think about Harm Minimisation and the opportunities for interventions. Where are the points at which an intervention could take place?*
- *Help and assistance is more important than punishment. Working in the criminal justice system, punishment is top of the list, this need to be secondary or take it out completely.*
- *Support the women to their appointments, be involved in getting scripts, help them out with social security, housing. Hand holding, just being there for them and supporting them through is vital.*